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# BOULE DE SUIF

## AND OTHER STORIES

*Stories by Guy de Maupassant*
*Translated by Marjorie Laurie*

BOULE DE SUIF
THE HOUSE OF MADAME TELLIER
A LIFE
YVETTE
BEL-AMI
TALES OF DAY AND NIGHT
MONT-ORIOL
PIERRE AND JEAN
THE MASTER PASSION
NOTRE CŒUR

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# BOULE DE SUIF

## and other stories

*By*

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

*Translated by*

MARJORIE LAURIE

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# BOULE DE SUIF

# BOULE DE SUIF

For several consecutive days, the remnants of a shattered army had been passing through the town. They were no longer a disciplined body, but a disorganised rabble. Their beards were unkempt and neglected, their uniforms ragged, and the men, separated from their colours and their regiments, marched listlessly. All of them seemed crushed and worn out, incapable of thought or initiative. They marched on from mere force of habit and, as soon as a man stopped moving, he collapsed. The bulk of them were civilians, easy-going citizens, who had been called to the colours and seemed bent down by the weight of their rifles, or undersized conscripts of the last line, quick of apprehension, as prone to panic as to enthusiasm, as ready for attack as for flight. Some regular soldiers in red breeches, sole survivors of a division ground to powder in a great battle, and some sombre gunners, mingled with these nondescript infantry men, and here and there appeared the flashing helmet of a booted dragoon, with difficulty keeping pace with the more lightly shod foot-soldier.

Detachments of *francs-tireurs,* who looked like bandits but bore grandiloquent names, such as " Avengers of Defeat, " Citizens of the Grave," " The Brotherhood of Death," passed through in their turn. Their leaders, all flannel and gold lace and armed to the teeth, were

retired drapers, corn chandlers, dealers in soap and tallow, who had turned soldier by force of circumstance, and had been elected officers, by virtue of their money or their moustaches. In loud, braggart tones, they discussed plans of campaign, as though they alone were sustaining France in her death agony upon their vainglorious shoulders. But they went in fear of their own men, who were a ruffianly gang and, though often desperately brave, could not be withheld from looting and debauchery.

There was a rumour that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen. The National Guard, who, for the last two months, had been engaged in reconnoitring cautiously the neighbouring woods, sometimes shooting their own sentries, and preparing for action every time a rabbit stirred in a bush, had returned to their firesides. Their arms, their uniforms, all the apparatus of slaughter, with which they had formerly terrorised every milestone within a radius of three leagues, had suddenly vanished.

The last of the French Army had just crossed the Seine, making for Pont-Audemer by way of Saint-Sever and Bourg-Achard. The rear was brought up by the General marching on foot between two orderly officers. In despair, unable to attempt anything with this medley of broken units, he felt overwhelmed in the utter ruin of a people, hitherto accustomed to victory, but now, despite its heroic prestige, disastrously defeated.

And now, a deep calm, an atmosphere of shuddering, silent apprehension brooded over the city. Many a plump citizen, whose manhood had been sapped by

commerce, anxiously awaited the conquerors, in dread lest his spits and his big kitchen knives should be regarded as weapons. Life seemed at a standstill. The shops were closed; the streets silent. Here and there a stray citizen, awed by the stillness, hurried along, keeping close to the wall. Such was the agony of suspense that the arrival of the enemy was looked forward to as a relief.

On the afternoon of the day following the departure of the French troops, some Uhlans, sprung no one knew whence, galloped through the town. A little later, dark masses of troops came pouring down the hill of St. Catherine, while two further torrents of invaders streamed along the roads from Darnetal and Boisguillaume. The advance guards of the three corps effected a well-timed junction in the square before the Town Hall, and down every street leading to the square the German Army poured in, battalion after battalion, while the paved streets rang under the hard, measured tread.

Orders, shouted in strange guttural voices, resounded along the walls of houses, which seemed dead and deserted, though behind the closed shutters eyes were spying upon the victors, who by the rules of war were masters of the city, masters of the property and lives of all. In their darkened rooms, the inhabitants had succumbed to that dazed condition produced by natural cataclysms, devastating convulsions of the earth, against which neither strength nor wisdom avails. This sensation is experienced whenever the established order of things is overturned, when no feeling of security remains, and all that is usually protected by the laws of

men or nature is at the mercy of blind and brutal force. The earthquake burying a whole nation beneath the ruins of their houses, the river bursting its banks, drowning peasants and their cattle, tearing rafters from roofs and sweeping all away; the triumphant army slaughtering all who resist, making prisoners of the rest, pillaging in the name of the Sword and giving thanks to God amid the roar of cannon: all alike are terrifying visitations which shatter our belief in eternal justice and the confidence we have been taught to place in divine protection and human reason.

Small squads of men knocked at the door of every house and disappeared inside. This was the occupation, the sequel of the invasion. It was now the duty of the vanquished to show themselves courteous to the conquerors.

When the first panic had subsided, a new sort of calm succeeded. In many families, the Prussian officer sat at table with his hosts. If he happened to be a well-bred man, he politely deplored the woes of France and expressed his personal repugnance to the war. His hosts were grateful for these generous sentiments and, besides, any day they might need his protection. If they humoured him, they might perhaps have fewer men billeted on them. Why should they hurt the man's feelings when they were entirely in his power? To do so would be an act of foolhardiness rather than courage, and foolhardiness is no longer a defect in the character of the burgesses of Rouen, however it might have been in the days of the heroic defences which made their city illustrious. Eventually, appealing to the traditions of French urbanity, they reasoned that it was quite

permissible to treat the alien soldier with courtesy within doors, provided that there was no fraternisation in public. Though they did not recognise him in the street, at home they were ready to talk to him, and the German soldier sat longer and longer every evening, warming himself at the domestic hearth.

Little by little, the town itself began to resume its normal appearance. For the present, the French population remained indoors, but the streets were swarming with Prussian soldiers. After all, the officers of the Blue Hussars, arrogantly trailing their great sabres along the pavement, did not treat the plain townsman with such a vast deal more of contempt than their own chasseur officers, who had sat drinking in the same cafés the year before.

Yet, for all that, there was something in the air, some indefinable and subtle quality, a strange and intolerable atmosphere, a diffused exhalation—the effluvium of invasion. It penetrated into private houses and public places, tainting the food, producing an unhomelike sense, as of exile in distant lands among tribes of hostile savages.

The victorious army demanded money, vast sums of money. The population kept paying out and indeed they could afford to do so. But the wealthier he is, the more keenly the Norman trader feels the smallest sacrifice, the transfer of the least fraction of his property into the hands of another.

It was true that a few miles down the Seine, in the vicinity of Croisset, Dieppedalle or Biessart, bargemen and fishermen often brought up from the bottom the bloated corpse of a German soldier in uniform, who had

been stabbed or kicked to death, or pushed into the water off a bridge, or had had his head battered in by a stone. The mud of the river engulfed the victims of these surreptitious acts of vengeance, savage yet justifiable, these deeds of obscure heroism, these secret assaults, more perilous than open battle and without the meed of fame. Hatred of the invaders will always nerve some valiant soul to die for an idea.

At length, finding that the invaders, although subjecting the town to rigorous discipline, had not perpetrated any of the atrocities with which rumour had credited them throughout the whole course of their triumphant march, the population plucked up courage and the tradesmen's business instincts began to revive. Some of them had weighty interests at Havre, which was still held by the French, and were anxious to make an attempt to reach that port, travelling overland to Dieppe and embarking there. Through the influence of German officers, whose acquaintance they had made, a permit for leaving Rouen could be obtained from the General in command.

A large four-horse coach was accordingly engaged for the journey; ten persons had reserved seats in it, and it was agreed to set out one Tuesday morning, before day-break, so as to avoid exciting attention. For some time there had been a hard frost, and on Monday afternoon great black clouds gathered from the north and snow fell incessantly all that evening and the following night.

At half-past four in the morning, the travellers met in the yard of the Hotel de Normandie, where they were to take the coach. They were still half asleep and shivered

with cold under their wraps. It was too dark for them to see one another clearly. Under their accumulations of heavy winter clothes, they all resembled corpulent priests in long cassocks. Two men, however, recognised each other; a third joined them, and they entered into conversation.

"I have brought my wife," said one.

"So have I."

"And I, too."

The first speaker added—"We do not propose to return to Rouen. If the Prussians advance on Havre we shall make our way to England."

The three men were all of the same pattern and had the same plans.

There was, however, no sign of the horses. An ostler carrying a little lantern emerged from time to time from one mysterious door only to disappear through another. Horses' hoofs could be heard stamping on the ground, the noise muffled by stable litter, and from the far end of the building came the voice of a man talking to the animals and swearing. The tinkling of little bells proclaimed that the harness was being made ready, and this sound soon developed into a clear, continuous jingling, in rhythm with the horses' movements, now and then ceasing, only to begin again with a sudden jerk, to the accompaniment of the dull clang of an iron-shod hoof on the stable floor. The door suddenly closed and everything was still. The half-frozen travellers stopped talking and stood there stiff and motionless. A curtain of glistening snow flakes descended towards the earth, veiling every human form and covering inanimate objects with an icy fleece. In

the intense stillness of the town, plunged in the deep repose of winter, no sound was audible save that vague, indefinable, fluttering whisper of the falling snow, felt rather than heard, the mingling of airy atoms, which seemed to fill all space and envelop the whole world.

The man with the lantern reappeared, dragging along by a rope a dejected and reluctant horse. He put the horse alongside the carriage-pole and spent a long time adjusting the harness, for he could only use one hand, as the other held the light. As he was going off to fetch the second horse, he noticed the travellers all standing there motionless and already white with snow.

" Why don't you get into the carriage?" he said. " You would at least be under cover."

Apparently this had not occurred to them and they made a rush for the coach. The three husbands installed their wives at the far end and seated themselves beside them. The other veiled and vague forms took the remaining places without uttering a word.

Their feet sank into the straw which covered the floor. The ladies at the far end had brought little copper foot-warmers with a chemical preparation of charcoal which they lighted, and for some time, in subdued voices, they dwelt upon the advantages of these possessions, assuring one another of facts of which they had all long been aware.

At last the coach was ready. It had a team of six horses instead of four in consideration of the bad state of the roads. A voice from without asked:

" Is everyone in? "

A voice from within replied:

Yes," and they set off.

The progress of the coach was laborious and very slow. The wheels sank into the snow. Every joint in the whole machine creaked and moaned. The smoking horses slipped and panted, the driver's immense whip cracked incessantly, flickering in all directions, now tying itself into knots and uncoiling itself again like a slender snake, now stinging a bulging hind quarter and inciting its owner to more strenuous efforts. Imperceptibily, day began to dawn. The fall of ethereal snow-flakes, which one of the travellers, a true-blooded native of Rouen, had compared to a shower of cotton, had ceased. A livid light filtered through the dense and lowering clouds, whose blackness set off the dazzling whiteness of the landscape. Here and there stood out a row of tall, frosted trees, or a cottage under a hood of snow.

Inside the carriage, the passengers scrutinised one another inquisitively by the melancholy light of dawn.

Dozing opposite each other in the best places at the end sat Monsieur and Madame Loiseau, wholesale wine merchants of the Rue Grand-Pont. Originally a clerk in an office, after his employer's bankruptcy, Loiseau had bought the business and made a fortune. He sold very bad wine at very low prices to small retailers in country places. He was regarded by his friends and acquaintances as a knowing rascal and a true Norman, a jovial fellow, up to every dodge. His reputation for sharp practice was so notorious that one evening at a party at the Prefecture Monsieur Tournel, a local celebrity, author of some songs and stories and a man of

shrewd and caustic wit, proposed to the ladies, who seemed to him somewhat drowsy, a game of " Loiseau vole", " The bird steals away". The jest flew through the Prefect's drawing rooms and thence to all the other drawing rooms in the town and for a month it set the whole province laughing. Loiseau himself was famous for practical jokes of all kinds, good-natured and otherwise, so that no one mentioned his name without adding: " That fellow Loiseau is really priceless". He was short, his stomach bulged like a balloon and was surmounted by a red face fringed with grizzled whiskers. His wife, a tall, stout, determined woman, loud-voiced and positive, was the methodical and financial factor in the business, while he brought to it his own exuberant vitality.

Next to them, with the dignity of a higher class, sat Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of good standing in the cotton business, owner of three cotton-factories, officer of the Legion of Honour and Member of the Conseil Général. Under the Empire, he posed as leader of a benevolent opposition, solely in order to sell at a higher price his desertion to the side against which he had fought, but always, as he said, with weapons of courtesy. Madame Carré-Lamadon was much younger than her husband. She had been a great comfort to officers of good family, garrisoned at Rouen. A slight, dainty figure, muffled in furs, she sat opposite her husband, staring disconsolately at the deplorable interior of the coach.

Their neighbours were the Count and Countess Hubert de Bréville, who bore one of the oldest and most aristocratic names in Normandy. The Count, an

old nobleman of dignified demeanour, took pains to accentuate by tricks of the toilet his natural likeness to King Henri IV. According to a legend of which the family were very proud, that monarch had seduced a Madame de Bréville and, in return, had made her husband a Count and Governor of a Province. He was associated with Monsieur Carré-Lamadon on the Conseil Général, and was the local representative of the Orléanist party. The story of his marriage with the daughter of a petty shipowner of Nantes had always been a mystery. But thanks to her stately air, her genius for entertaining, and the rumour that one of the sons of Louis Philippe had been her lover, all the county families paid court to her. Her salon held its own as the first in the neighbourhood. Access to it was not easy, and it was the only drawing room where old world courtesy survived. The fortune of the Brévilles, all in landed estate, was said to yield an income of half a million francs.

These six were the backbone of the party. They represented the wealthy, placid, solid element of society, respectable, influential persons of religion and principle.

It so happened, that all the women were seated on the same side. Next to the Countess sat two nuns telling their long rosaries and muttering Paternosters and Aves. One of them was old; her skin was deeply pitted with small pox as if she had received a charge of shot full in the face. Her companion was a puny creature with a pretty but sickly face and the narrow chest of a consumptive, a prey to that burning faith which creates visionaries and martyrs. Opposite the two nuns sat a man and a woman who excited every-

one's interest. The man was Cornudet, a notorious democrat, the terror of all respectable people. For the last twenty years, he had been wetting his long red beard with mugs of beer at every democratic pothouse. With the help of his boon companions, he had frittered away a respectable fortune which he had inherited from his father, a retired confectioner; and he looked forward eagerly to the coming of the Republic, when he would enter upon the office he had earned by all his libations to the Revolution. On the fourth of September, probably in consequence of a practical joke, he got the idea into his head that he had been elected Prefect; but when he essayed to take up his duties, the clerks at the Prefecture, who remained in sole possession, refused to rcognise him and he was forced to beat a retreat. For all that, he was a very good fellow, harmless and obliging, and he had thrown himself heart and soul into organising the defence of the town. He had had pits dug in the open country, had had all the young trees in the neighbouring forests cut down and traps set on all the roads, and, satisfied with his preparations, he had at the approach of the enemy, scuttled back to the city. He felt now that he would be more useful at Havre where fresh entrenchments would be needed.

The woman beside him was one of those who are technically called gay. She was famous for her premature portliness, which had earned for her the nickname of Boule de Suif, ball of lard, " tallow-keech." Short, perfectly spherical, fat as dripping, with puffy fingers, dented at the joints like strings of sausages, her skin shining and smooth, her enormous breasts swelling beneath her bodice, she had nevertheless remained so

fresh and blooming that she continued to fascinate and allure. Her face was like a ruddy apple or a peony bud ready to burst into flower. Her magnificent black eyes were shaded and deepened by long, thick lashes. Her pouting, charming mouth, ripe for kisses, revealed two rows of tiny dazzling teeth. It was whispered that she had many other priceless qualities.

As soon as they recognised her, the respectable women began to murmur among themselves and the words "prostitute", "open shame" were whispered so audibly that she looked up. She bestowed upon her companions a glance so bold and challenging that a deep silence ensued and everyone sat with downcast eyes, except Loiseau, who stole arch glances at her.

But very soon, the three ladies, united in a sudden friendship verging on intimacy by the intrusion of that brazen hussy, resumed their conversation. They felt that they must ensconce themselves behind the dignities of wedded estate in face of this shameless hireling. For legalised love always assumes airs of superiority over its random brother.

The three husbands, on the other hand, were drawn together by a common defensive instinct at the sight of Cornudet. They discussed money matters in tones that implied their scorn of poorer folk. Count Hubert alluded to the losses in stolen cattle and ruined crops he had sustained at the hands of the Prussians in the negligent manner of a magnate worth ten millions, who is fully aware that the inconvenience will hardly be felt in a year's time.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a cotton merchant of wide experience, had taken the precaution to send to England

six hundred thousand francs as provision for a rainy day. As for Loiseau, he had arranged to sell to the French Commissariat all the common wines still in his cellars, so that the State owed him a handsome sum which he counted on receiving at Havre.

The three men exchanged swift and friendly glances. Though of different standing, they were linked together by the common tie of money, members of that wide freemasonry of the well-to-do who can thrust their hands into their trouser pockets and jingle the gold there.

The coach moved so slowly that by ten o'clock they had not accomplished more than ten miles. On three occasions, the men got out and walked up the hills. They all began to feel uneasy. They had intended to lunch at Tôtes but they had small hopes now of arriving there before nightfall. Everyone was on the look out for a wayside inn, when the diligence plunged into a snow-drift from which they were not extricated for two hours. Their increasing hunger began to depress their spirits. There was no sign of the meanest tavern or wine shop; all the tradespeople had fled in terror before the advance of the Prussians and the retreat of the starving French troops. The men tried to get food from the farm houses by the roadside, but could not obtain even plain bread, for the cautious peasants had hidden away their stores for fear of being plundered by soldiers, desperate with hunger, who seized by force anything they could lay their hands on. Towards one o'clock, Loiseau announced that he was distinctly conscious of a painful vacuum in his interior. For some time everyone had been suffering from the same com-

plaint, and the steadily increasing pangs of hunger had put a stop to conversation. From time to time, one of the travellers yawned; and another would follow suit. One after the other, in accord with individual character, manners, and social position, they opened their mouths, some noisily, others quietly, hastily putting their hands up to hide the gaping chasm from which the breath issued in a cloud of steam.

Boule de Suif stooped down now and then as if looking for something under her petticoats. She would hesitate for a moment, glance at her neighbours, then quietly sit up again. The faces of all the travellers were pale and drawn. Loiseau vowed that he would give a thousand francs for a knuckle of ham. His wife made as if to protest but restrained herself. It was always painful to her to hear of money being squandered, and she could not bear even a joke on that subject.

"I do not feel at all well," said the Count. "Why didn't I think of bringing some provisions?"

Everyone blamed himself for the same omission. Cornudet, however, had a flask of rum; he offered it to his companions but they coldly declined. Loiseau alone took a couple of sips and thanked him as he returned the flask:

"That's some good, anyhow; it warms one up and cheats one's hunger."

The spirits put him in a good humour, and he suggested that they should do as they did in the song about the little boat, eat the fattest of the company. This sly allusion to Boule de Suif shocked his more refined companions. They made no reply; only Cornudet smiled. The two nuns had left off telling their beads; they sat

motionless, their hands thrust into their long sleeves; their eyes steadfastly downcast, doubtless offering as a sacrifice to Heaven the sufferings which it had imposed upon them.

At last, at three o'clock, when the coach was making its way across an interminable plain without a village in sight, Boule de Suif briskly bent down and drew from under the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin. First she took from it a little earthenware plate, next a dainty silver cup and then a large dish containing two carved fowls embedded in their jelly. The basket revealed glimpses of other good things carefully packed—pies, fruit, dainties, sufficient provisions for a three days' journey without having to fall back on the cookery of the inns.

The necks of four bottles protruded from among the parcels of food. Taking the wing of a chicken, she began daintily to eat it, with one of those rolls of bread called Régence in Normandy.

All eyes were fixed on her. The pleasant aroma of food was wafted abroad and the result was seen in distended nostrils, watering mouths and spasmodic contractions of the muscles of the jaw.

The ladies' contempt for the hussy rose to a fury; they were yearning to kill her or throw her out of the carriage into the snow, her, and her cup and her basket and her provisions.

Loiseau's eyes devoured the dish of fowls.

" Congratulations !" he said. " Madame has been more foreseeing than the rest of us. Some people always think of everything."

She turned towards him :

" Will you have some, sir? It is hard to go fasting all day."

He bowed.

" Frankly, I cannot refuse; I am at my last gasp. Any port in a storm, as they say." And casting a glance around him, he added: "One is lucky to find a friend in need on an occasion like this."

He spread a newspaper over his knees to save his trousers, and, with the point of a knife which he always carried in his pocket, he transfixed a leg of chicken thickly coated with jelly, tore at it with his teeth, and chewed it with such obvious enjoyment that his companions could not restrain a deep sigh of anguish.

In a low, gentle voice, Boule de Suif invited the two nuns to share her meal. They accepted with alacrity and without raising their eyes, murmured their thanks and quickly set to work. Nor did Cornudet decline his neighbour's invitation and between them they made a sort of table by spreading newspapers on their knees. Their jaws worked feverishly; they chewed and swallowed the food with ravenous haste.

Loiseau, busy in his corner, quietly pressed his wife to follow his example. She held out for a long time, but at last a piercing pang of hunger induced her to give way. Her husband with a well-turned phrase asked his " charming companion " if he might offer Madame Loiseau a small portion.

" Why, certainly, sir," she replied, with a pleasant smile, and handed her the dish.

A difficulty arose when the first bottle of Bordeaux was opened; there was only one cup. But they passed it round, each wiping it in turn. Cornudet alone, in a

spirit of gallantry, set his lips to the rim still moist from the lips of his fair neighbour.

With people eating and drinking all around them, the Count and Countess de Bréville and Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon, enveloped in the odour of food, endured the torments of Tantalus. Suddenly the manufacturer's wife gave a sigh which drew everyone's attention. She was as white as the snow outside; her eyes closed, her head drooped, she had fainted. Her distracted husband uttered a general appeal for help. The other passengers were utterly at a loss, but the elder nun raised the patient's head, held Boule de Suif's cup to her lips and induced her to swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty creature moved, opened her eyes, smiled, and in a faint voice declared that she felt perfectly well again. But, as a precaution, the nun made her drink a whole glass of Bordeaux, saying:

"It is nothing but sheer hunger."

Blushing in confusion, Boule de Suif looked at the four travellers, who were still fasting, and stammered out:

"O dear, if only I might venture to offer these ladies and gentlemen . . ." she broke off, in dread of a snub.

Loiseau resumed:

"Upon my soul, in cases like this, we are all brothers and should help one another. Come, ladies, the devil take ceremony; accept her offer. Why, we don't know whether we shall even find a night's lodging. At this rate, we shan't be at Tôtes before mid-day to-morrow."

They all hesitated, no one caring to take the responsibility of saying "Yes."

It was the Count who cut the knot. Turning to the

embarrassed young woman, and assuming his grandest air, he said:

"Madame, we gratefully accept your offer."

The first step was the only difficulty. The Rubicon once crossed, they fell to with a will. The basket was emptied. It still contained a pâté de foie gras, a pâté of larks, smoked tongue, some Crassane pears, a Pont l'Evèque cheese, some little cakes and a jar of pickled gherkins and onions. For, like all women, Boule de Suif had a taste for crude flavours.

It was impossible to eat the woman's food and not to talk to her. They entered into conversation, at first with some reserve, but presently, in view of her admirable behaviour, with increasing freedom. Madame de Bréville and Madame Carré-Lamadon, who were women of the world, were tactful and courteous. The Countess, in particular, treated Boule de Suif with the gracious condescension of very great ladies, whom no touch can soil, and was charming to her. Only stout Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a dragoon, remained obdurate, saying little but eating all the more.

The conversation turned naturally upon the war, the horrors perpetrated by the Prussians, and the gallant deeds of the French. All these people, who were running away, paid tribute to the courage of those who remained behind. Presently they came to personal experiences, and Boule de Suif, with real feeling and that fervent eloquence that sometimes characterises her class when carried away by emotion, gave her reasons for leaving Rouen:

"At first, I thought I could stay. My house was well stocked with food and I preferred to feed a few

soldiers rather than go into exile, God knows where. But when I saw those Prussians, it was too much for me. They made my blood boil and I cried with shame all day long. O, if only I were a man! I watched them out of my window, those fat swine with their spiked helmets, and my maid had to hold my hands to stop me from hurling chairs and tables on their heads. Then some of them were billeted on me. I sprang at the throat of the first one; they are no more difficult to strangle than anyone else. I should have done for him too if they had not dragged me off by my hair. After that I had to hide. So when I saw a chance, I came away and here I am."

They congratulated her warmly. She rose in the estimation of her companions, who had not shown such pluck. Cornudet listened to her with a benevolent and apostolic smile, like a priest who hears one of his flock praising God, for these long-bearded democrats think they have the monopoly of patriotism just as the men in cassocks are monopolists in religion. Speaking in his turn, he laid down the law with a pomposity borrowed from the proclamations posted up on the walls day after day; and he wound up with a burst of eloquence, in which he inveighed magisterially against that blackguard Badinguet, as he designated Napoleon III.

But Boule de Suif at once fired up, for she was a Bonapartist. She flushed as red as a cherry and stammered with rage: " I should just like to see fellows like you in his position. A nice mess you would have made of it. It's your sort who betrayed the man. There would be nothing for it but to leave France if it were governed by scoundrels like you."

Cornudet was unmoved and continued to smile his disdainful, superior smile. But a violent outburst of abuse was only averted by the Count, who, not without difficulty, contrived to pacify the angry young woman, authoritatively declaring that all sincere opinions were entitled to respect. But the Countess and Madame Carré-Lamadon, who cherished the unreasonable hatred felt by all respectable people for the Republic, and the instinctive devotion, with which every woman regards despotic Governments with their pomps and ceremonies, felt themselves involuntarily drawn towards this prostitute of unbending convictions and sentiments so closely allied to their own.

The basket was empty. Ten hungry people had made short work of its contents. Their only regret was that it had not been larger. Conversation continued for a while, but it grew more constrained when the repast was over.

Night fell; the darkness gradually deepened, and the cold, always more keenly felt after a meal, made Boule de Suif shiver, well-covered though she was. At this, Madame de Bréville offered her her foot-warmer, in which the charcoal had been renewed several times since the morning. Boule de Suif accepted it with alacrity as her feet were like ice. Madame Carré-Lamadon and Madame Loiseau gave their foot-warmers to the two nuns.

The driver had lighted the lamps, which cast a vivid glare upon the cloud of steam rising from the reeking quarters of the wheelers, and upon the roadside snow which seemed to be unrolling itself under the shifting radiance. Within the carriage all was dark, but sud-

denly there was some by-play between Boule de Suif and Cornudet. Loiseau, straining his eyes through the gloom, thought he saw the man with the long beard start violently away, as if he had received a forcible but noiseless cuff.

On the road ahead, little points of light began to twinkle. It was Tôtes. They had been thirteen hours on the way, including four halts of half an hour each to rest and feed the horses. They entered the town and drew up at the Hotel du Commerce.

The door of the carriage was flung open. A familiar sound made all the travellers shudder. It was the jingling of a scabbard on the ground. At the same time they heard an exclamation in a German voice.

Though the coach had stopped, no one got out. It was as if the travellers expected to be massacred as soon as they emerged. Then the driver came to the door, flashing his lamps into the furthest recesses of the coach and lighting up two rows of frightened faces with open mouths and eyes bulging with surprise and terror. Beside the driver, in the full glare of the lamp, stood a German officer, a tall fair young man, extremely slender, squeezed into his uniform like a girl into her corset, wearing on one side his polished flat cap which gave him the appearance of a boots at an English hotel. His huge, long, straight moustache tapered on either side to a point consisting of a single yellow hair, so fine that the extremity was invisible. Its weight seemed to depress the corners of his mouth and by dragging down his cheeks to give to his lips the appearance of drooping. In the French of Alsace, he invited the travellers to alight, saying in a severe voice:

" Will you get out, ladies and gentlemen?"

The two nuns were the first to obey, with the docility of women habituated by their vows to implicit obedience. Next came the Count and Countess, followed by the manufacturer and his wife; then Loiseau, pushing his better half before him. When he set foot on the ground, Loiseau, from prudence rather than politeness, said to the officer: " Good evening, sir." The latter, with the insolence of authority, stared at him without reply. Boule de Suif and Cornudet, though nearest to the door, were the last to emerge, confronting the enemy with a grave and lofty air. The stout young woman endeavoured to control herself and to remain calm. The democrat twisted his long red beard with a histrionic gesture, defiant, yet timid. Conscious that in an encounter such as this, each individual is in some measure the representative of his country, they were anxious to preserve their diginty. Both alike were disgusted at their companions' servility. Boule de Suif desired to prove herself of loftier spirit than those honest women, her fellow travellers, while Cornudet, realizing that it behoved him to set an example, continued by his attitude the task of resistance which he had begun when he dug up the roads. They went into the great kitchen of the inn, where the German officer, having demanded their permit for departure, signed by the General in Command, in which were set forth the names, description and profession of each of the travellers, minutely examined them all, comparing their appearance with the written record. Then he said abruptly:

" All right!" and disappeared.

They breathed once more. Being hungry again they

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ordered supper. It was promised in half an hour; and while two maids were busy preparing it, they went to look at the bedrooms, all of which opened upon a long passage, with a glazed door at the end.

Just as they were sitting down to supper, the host appeared. He was a retired horse-dealer, a stout man troubled with asthma, constantly wheezing, coughing and clearing his throat. His father had bequeathed to him the name of Follenvie.

" Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset? . . ." he asked.

Boule de Suif turned to him in alarm.

"Yes?"

" Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wishes to speak to you at once."

" To me?"

" Yes, if you are really Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset?"

She hesitated for a moment in dismay, then she said roundly: " He may want me, but I shan't go."

This caused a sensation among the company. Every one gave his opinion, discussing the reason for the summons. The Count went up to Boule de Suif:

" You are wrong, Madam; for your refusal may have serious consequences, not only for yourself but all your companions. One should never resist those who have the upper hand. Compliance surely cannot involve you in any danger; no doubt it is on account of some formality which has been omitted."

The others seconded him; they begged, urged and lectured Boule de Suif till finally they persuaded her. For they dreaded the complications which might result from her rashness. At last she said:

" Well, remember it's for your sakes I do it."

The Countess clasped her hand:

" You have our grateful thanks."

Boule de Suif left the room. The others awaited her return before sitting down to supper. Everyone regretted not having been sent for instead of that headstrong, passionate girl, and each rehearsed in his mind suitable platitudes in case he should be summoned in his turn. In ten minutes time, she returned, breathless, scarlet in the face, choking with rage and gasping out:

" The cad! The cad!"

They were eager to hear what had happened, but she would not say a word. And when the Count insisted, she replied with much dignity:

" No, it does not concern you; I cannot tell you."

They gathered round a large soup-toureen which emitted a smell of cabbage. In spite of the disturbing incident, it was a merry supper. The cider was good. Monsieur and Madame Loiseau and the nuns drank it from motives of economy. All the others sent for wine, except Cornudet, who demanded beer. He had his own way of opening the bottle, frothing up the liquor and contemplating it, first tilting his glass, then holding it up to the light to admire the colour. When he drank, his long beard, which was tinged with the colour of his favourite beverage, seemed to quiver with emotion; he squinted in his anxiety not to lose sight of his mug, and it seemed as if he were discharging the one function for which he had been created. One felt that he was effecting in his mind a junction; establishing an affinity between the two ruling passions of his life: Pale Ale and

the Revolution. Clearly he could not taste the one without thinking of the other.

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie supped at the other end of the table. The inn-keeper, wheezing like a broken-winded engine, suffered from a constriction of the chest, which prevented him from talking while he ate; but his wife's tongue clacked without ceasing. She gave a detailed account of all her feelings on the arrival of the Prussians, of everything they had done and said, abusing them first because they cost her money, next because she had two sons in the army. She addressed most of her remarks to the Countess, flattered by the thought that she was speaking to a lady of quality. Presently she lowered her voice and entered upon such delicate topics, that her husband, every now and then, interrupted her: "You had much better keep quiet, Madame Follenvie!" But she paid no attention to him and went on:

"Yes, Madam, those fellows do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, and then more pork and potatoes. And they have filthy habits, and if you could only see them drilling in a field, hour after hour, day after day, marching and wheeling and turning in all directions. It is not as if they worked on the land or mended the roads in their own country. No, Madame, these soldiers are of no use to anyone. And yet the poor have to support them, simply for them to learn how to slaughter people. It's true I am only an ignorant old woman; but when I see these men wearing themselves out, tramping about from morning till night, I say to myself: 'When there are people finding out so many useful things, why should others take all that trouble

to destroy? Isn't it really abominable to kill our fellow-men, whether they are Prussians or English or Poles or French? If you take revenge on some one who has wronged you, it's a crime, or you wouldn't be punished; but if you shoot down our boys like game, I suppose it's all right, as those who kill most are given decorations.' I tell you, it's a thing I shall never understand."

Cornudet raised his voice:

"War is barbarous when it's an attack on a peaceful neighbour. It is a sacred duty in the defence of one's country."

The old woman nodded:

"O yes, self-defence is quite another thing. But wouldn't it be better to kill all the kings, who make war for their own pleasure?"

Cornudet's eyes flashed:

"Bravo, citizeness," he cried.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was plunged in deep thought. Though he had a passionate admiration for great soldiers, this peasant woman's commonsense made him think of all the wealth that would accrue to a country, if all these idle hands, now a drain on its finances, all the sterile power it had to maintain, were employed on vast industrial enterprises, which in the present circumstances it would take centuries to achieve.

Loiseau, however, left his chair for a quiet talk with the fat inn-keeper, who laughed and coughed and spat; his enormous paunch quivered with joy at his neighbour's jests and he gave him an order for six half hogsheads of Bordeaux to be delivered in the Spring after the Prussians had gone.

Supper was hardly finished when the travellers, tired to death, went off to bed.

But Loiseau had been taking in everything. He sent his wife to bed and then applied ear and eye by turns to the key-hole with a view to discovering what he called " the mysteries of the corridor."

After about an hour, he heard a rustling sound, and hastily peeping out he saw Boule de Suif, looking fatter than ever in a blue cashmere dressing-gown, trimmed with white lace. She carried a candle and was making for the glazed door at the end of the corridor. Another door was cautiously opened and when she presently returned, Cornudet came out in his shirt sleeves and followed her. There was a whispered conversation and then a silence. Boule de Suif seemed to protest energetically against his entry into her bedroom. Loiseau was unfortunately unable to hear all that was said, but as they raised their voices, he at last caught a word here and there. Cornudet was insisting eagerly :

" Come now, don't be silly," he said. " What can it matter to you ?"

She answered indignantly :

" No, my dear, there are times when these things are not done. Just now, it would be scandalous !"

Evidently he did not see her point, and pressed her for a reason. Roused to wrath, she exclaimed in still louder tones :

" You ask why ? Don't you see why ? When there are Prussians in the house, perhaps even in the room next door !"

He was silenced. The patriotic delicacy of this poor outcast, who would not submit to an embrace while the

enemy was within the gates, must have revived his waning sense of decency; for, after one kiss, he tiptoed back to his own room.

Highly elated, Loiseau left the key-hole, cut a caper about the room, put on his night cap, and turning back the sheet which covered the gaunt form of his spouse, he woke her with a kiss, murmuring:

"Do you love me, darling?"

Silence then fell on the house. But soon there arose from some quarter difficult to define, which might have been the cellar or the garret, a powerful, monotonous, rhythmic snore, long drawn out, and vibrant as an engine boiler under pressure. Monsieur Follenvie slept.

As it had been arranged to start at eight o'clock the next morning, the party assembled in the kitchen at an early hour. But the coach, its top covered with snow, stood forlornly in the middle of the court-yard without horses or driver. They hunted vainly for the latter in stables, granary and coach-house. The men then decided to go out and scour the country for him. They reached the market place with the church at the far end, and on either side a row of low-pitched houses, where they caught sight of Prussian soldiers. The first one they saw was peeling potatoes. The next, a little further on, was washing down the barber's shop. Another bearded warrior was petting a tiny child and endeavouring to check its tears by rocking it on his knees. The buxom peasant women, whose men had gone to the war, indicated by means of signs what tasks they desired their docile conquerors to undertake: wood to be split, or coffee to be ground, or bread to cut up

for the soup. One soldier was actually doing the washing for his hostess, a helpless old grandam.

In surprise, the Count questioned the beadle as he came out of the presbytery. The old church rat replied:

"O, this lot are not at all bad; they are not Prussians, I'm told, but come from further off, I don't exactly know where. And every man of them has left a wife and children in his own country. The war is no joke to them, I'll be bound. Their women, too, are crying for their men-folk and are every bit as miserable as our own women here. However, just now we are not so badly off; the soldiers do no harm and are ready for any odd job just as if they were at home. You see, sir, poor folk must help one another. It is the great ones who make the wars."

Cornudet felt indignant at the friendly feeling that united conquerors and conquered and went home, preferring to shut himself up in the inn. Loiseau had his little joke:

"They are restocking the country."

But Monsieur Carré-Lamadon solemnly said:

"It is reparations."

The driver was nowhere to be seen. At last they ran him to earth in the village café, fraternizing with the officers' orderly. The Count addressed him:

"Were you not ordered to have the carriage ready by eight o'clock?"

"Yes, to be sure, but I had another order afterwards."

"What order?"

"Not to get it ready at all."

"Who gave you that order?"

"Why, the Prussian Commandant."

"For what reason?"

"I don't know. Go and ask him. I was told not to get it ready. So I didn't, and there it is."

"Did he give you the order in person?"

"No, sir, it was through the inn-keeper."

"When was that?"

"Yesterday evening, as I was going to bed."

The three men returned to the inn, feeling very uneasy. They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but the maid answered that her master, on account of his asthma, never got up before ten o'clock. He had given strict orders that he was never to be called at an earlier hour, except in case of fire. They then desired to see the officer but that was absolutely out of the question, although he was staying in the hotel. Monsieur Follenvie alone was authorised to speak to him on civil business. So they had to wait. The ladies went back to their rooms and passed the time with trifling occupations.

Cornudet installed himself in the kitchen chimney corner, where a mighty fire was blazing. A pot of beer stood on a table in front of him; and he took out his pipe which, in democratic circles, was regarded with almost as much respect as its owner, as if in serving Cornudet, it served the State. It was a fine meerschaum with a curved stem, beautifully coloured, as black as its master's teeth, redolent and shining, an old friend and a characteristic adjunct to his physiognomy. He sat perfectly still, his eyes now on the flaming hearth, now on the froth of his mug of beer, and whenever he had taken a pull he would pass his

long, lean fingers through his greasy locks, while he sucked the froth from his moustache with an air of content.

Under pretext of stretching his legs, Loiseau went out to sell his wine to the local retailers. The Count and the manufacturer talked politics and speculated as to the future of France. The one believed in the Orléans, the other looked for an unknown saviour, a hero who would come to the rescue when all seemed lost; a du Guesclin, perhaps, or a Joan of Arc, or a second Napoleon. Ah, if only the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet listened like one who knows the secrets of destiny. The aroma of his pipe filled the kitchen.

On the stroke of ten, Monsieur Follenvie appeared. To their eager questions, he had only one reply, which he repeated two or three times:

"The officer said to me just like this: 'Monsieur Follenvie, you will give orders not to have the carriage ready to-morrow for those travellers. I do not wish them to proceed without my consent. You understand? . . . Very good!'"

They then asked to see the officer. The Count sent in his card, on which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon had written his name and all his distinctions. The Prussian sent word that he would receive them after luncheon, about one o'clock.

The ladies came down and, in spite of their uneasiness, they partook of a light meal. Boule de Suif seemed out of sorts and terribly worried. As they were finishing their coffee, the orderly came for the two gentlemen, and Loiseau joined the Count and Monsieur Carré-

Lamadon. They tried to enlist Cornudet to add weight to the deputation, but he declared haughtily that he was resolved never to hold any communication with Germans; and he sat down again in his chimney corner, and called for another pot of beer.

The three men went upstairs and were ushered into the best room of the inn, where the officer received them. Lolling in an armchair, with both feet on the mantelpiece, he was smoking a long porcelain pipe and was wrapped in a gaudy dressing gown, doubtless looted from the deserted house of some middle-class person of execrable taste. He neither rose nor saluted, not even looked at them. He was a perfect specimen of the insolence which is natural to a victorious soldiery.

At last, after some moments had elapsed, he said:

"What do you want?"

The Count was the spokesman:

"Sir, we wish to continue our journey."

"You can't."

"Might I venture to ask the reason of your refusal?"

"I do not wish you to go."

"I would respectfully bring to your notice, sir, that the General in Command has given us a permit to go to Dieppe; I am not aware that we have done anything to deserve this harsh treatment."

"I do not wish it. That's all. You may go."

The three delegates bowed and withdrew.

They spent a melancholy afternoon. Unable to interpret the capricious behaviour of the German officer, they were tormented by the most fantastic ideas. Gathered in the kitchen, they engaged in endless discussions and hazarded the wildest conjectures. Perhaps it was in-

tended to keep them as hostages—but for what purpose? —or to take them away as prisoners, or, more likely still, to exact a substantial ransom? . . . At this suggestion, they were panic-stricken. The wealthier they were, the more they were horrified. They saw themselves forced to purchase their lives with bags of gold poured into the lap of that insolent soldier. They racked their brains to devise plausible falsehoods for disguising their wealth, and for passing themselves off for very poor people indeed. Loiseau took off his watch chain and hid it in his pocket. With nightfall, their fears increased. The lamp was lit, and as there were still two hours till dinner, Madame Loiseau proposed a game of Trente-et-un to pass the time. Everyone welcomed this suggestion, including Cornudet, who, out of politeness, extinguished his pipe.

The Count shuffled the cards and dealt. Boule de Suif in the very first round held thirty-one. Very soon, in the excitement of the game, their haunting fears subsided. Cornudet, however, noticed that the two Loiseaus were helping each other to cheat.

Just as they were sitting down to dinner, Monsieur Follenvie came in. In his husky voice, he said:

"The Prussian officer wishes to know if Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset has changed her mind yet."

Boule de Suif turned pale. She remained standing. But suddenly she flushed crimson, choking with rage, unable to utter a word. At last she broke out:

"You may tell that blackguard, that dirty scoundrel, that filthy Prussian, that I never will. Have you got it? Never, never, never."

The fat inn-keeper went off. The others gathered

round Boule de Suif, teasing her with questions, imploring her to reveal the mystery of her interview with the Prussian. At first she stood out, but finally, carried away by her resentment, she cried:

"What does he want? . . . What does he want? . . . He wants to sleep with me!"

So keen was their indignation that no one was shocked at the phrase. Cornudet brought his mug so violently down on the table that he broke it. There was a general outcry against this unworthy soldier. Swept by a common gust of anger, they resolved unanimously upon resistance, as if each of them had been called upon to contribute to the sacrifice.

With an air of disgust, the Count declared that these fellows were behaving like the barbarians of old. The ladies, in particular, lavished upon Boule de Suif vehement demonstrations of sympathy. The nuns, who appeared only at meal times, bowed their heads and held their peace.

After the first burst of anger had subsided, they dined, but conversation languished; everyone was pensive.

The ladies retired early; the men smoked and got up a game of écarté in which they invited Monsieur Follenvie to join, with the object of skilfully eliciting from him the best means of overcoming the officer's opposition. But he devoted his whole attention to the cards, listened to no questions, and made no reply; calling out continually: "Play, gentlemen, play!" His attention was so closely fixed that he even forgot to spit, with the result that his chest became like organ pipes. His wheezing lungs ran through the whole asthmatical gamut, from deep bass notes to the shrill

squawk of a cockerel trying to crow. He declined to go to bed when his wife, dropping with fatigue, came to look for him. So she went off alone, for she was an early bird, always up with the sun; while her husband preferred late hours and was always ready to make a night of it with his friends. He called out to her:

"Put my egg-flip before the fire,"

and went on with the game.

When they saw that they could get nothing out of him, they declared that it was time for them to stop and they all went off to bed.

They rose at a somewhat early hour the next morning, filled with a vague hope, an increasing desire to be gone, and a dread of another day in that horrible little inn.

Alas! the horses remained in the stable, and the driver was still invisible. For want of anything better to do, they hung about the coach.

Luncheon was a gloomy meal. A certain coldness began to manifest itself towards Boule de Suif. Night, which brings counsel, had somewhat modified her companions' view of the case. By this time, they were almost ready to blame the girl for not having secretly sought out the Prussian officer, with a view to providing a pleasant surprise for her fellow travellers the next morning. Could anything have been simpler? After all, who would have been the wiser? She could have saved her face by letting the officer know that she had taken pity on her fellow-travellers' distress. It would have been such a small matter for her. But as yet no one uttered these thoughts aloud.

In the afternoon, to relieve their devastating boredom, the Count suggested a walk on the outskirts of the

village. Carefully wrapped up, the little party set out, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred to stay by the fire, and the nuns who spent the days in church or at the parsonage. The cold, which was daily increasing in intensity, sharply nipped their ears and noses; their feet ached so painfully that each step was torture. And the open country, under its pall of snow, stretching away beyond range of sight, produced upon them such a terrible impression of dreariness that they turned home, chilled and oppressed in heart and soul. The four women walked on ahead, while the three men followed at a little distance.

Loiseau, who had grasped the situation, suddenly asked if the " wench " meant to keep them hanging on much longer like this. Chivalrous as ever, the Count declared that they could not ask a woman to make so painful a sacrifice; it must be voluntary. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon observed that if the French, as was thought likely, turned and took the offensive by way of Dieppe, the engagement could only take place at Tôtes, a reflection which made the others uneasy.

" Suppose we escape on foot?" said Loiseau.

" Out of the question in all this snow, and with our wives too," said the Count shrugging his shoulders. " Besides, they would be after us in no time; we should be caught within ten minutes and brought back as prisoners at the mercy of the soldiers."

There was no answer to this and they relapsed into silence.

The ladies discussed fashions, but a feeling of constraint seemed to disturb the harmony.

Suddenly, the Prussian officer appeared at the end of

the street. His tall, wasp-waisted, uniformed figure stood out sharply against the snowy background. He walked with his knees well apart, with the gait characteristic of military men, who are anxious not to splash their beautifully polished boots. He bowed as he passed the ladies, but glanced contemptuously at the men who, for their part, did not lower themselves so far as to take off their hats, though Loiseau made as if to do so.

Boule de Suif blushed up to the eyes, and the three married women felt deeply mortified at having been seen by the officer in the company of the young woman whom he had treated so cavalierly.

Then they discussed him, criticising his face and figure. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had known a great many officers and spoke with the authority of an expert, declared that he was not at all unprepossessing. It was a pity, she actually said, that he was not a Frenchman; he would have made a very smart Hussar and have had all the women mad about him.

When they returned to the inn, they were at their wits' end for something to do. Sharp words were exchanged on the slightest provocation. Dinner was a short and silent meal, and everyone went to bed, hoping to kill time by going to sleep. The next morning they came downstairs with jaded looks and nerves on edge. The women would hardly speak to Boule de Suif.

The church bell rang for a christening. Boule de Suif had a child of her own, who was being brought up in a peasant family at Yvetot. She saw it scarcely once a year and never troubled her head about it. But now the thoughts of the infant about to be christened awoke in her a sudden burst of tender feeling towards

her own baby and nothing would do but she must be present at the ceremony.

As soon as she had left the inn, the others exchanged glances and drew their chairs close together, for they felt that it was really time they came to some decision. Loiseau had an inspiration. His suggestion was to invite the officer to keep back Boule de Suif by herself and to let the others go. Monsieur Follenvie undertook to convey this message, but he came back almost at once. The German, who knew what men were, had turned him out of the room. He intended to keep the whole party, till he should have attained his desire.

At this, the innate vulgarity of Madame Loiseau broke out.

" Anyhow, we are not going to stay here till we die of old age. It is the wretched creature's trade. One man is as good as another from her point of view. What right has she to pick and choose? I ask you. She never refused anyone who came along at Rouen, not even coachmen. Yes, indeed, Madam. Why, she has actually carried on with the mayor's coachman. I know all about that because he buys his wine from us. And now, when it is a question of getting us out of a mess, she put on airs, the slut. Really, I think the officer is behaving very well. He has probably had no opportunities for a long time; and here are we three whom he would no doubt have preferred. But no, he is ready to content himself with a common woman. He has a proper respect for married women. Remember, he is master here. He has only to raise a finger, and his soldiers would seize us for him by force."

The other women gave a little shudder. Pretty Madame Carré-Lamadon's eyes sparkled and she turned a little pale, as if she already felt herself forcibly abducted by the officer.

The men, who had been privately conferring, now joined the ladies. Loiseau, in a fury, was for delivering the wretch, bound hand and foot, to the enemy. But the Count, who was sprung from three generations of ambassadors and was himself a diplomat by instinct, counselled strategy.

" We must persuade her," he said.

So they proceeded to concoct a plan.

The women put their heads together. Voices were lowered and the discussion became general, everyone giving an opinion. It was all conducted with the utmost propriety. The ladies displayed a special aptitude for expressing by polite euphemisms and refined phrases, the most outrageous ideas. They were so careful of the conventions of speech that a stranger would have understood nothing.

But since the veneer of modesty with which every woman is provided, is purely superficial, they threw themselves heart and soul into this unsavoury affair, secretly revelling in it, perfectly in their element and dallying with the idea of the liaison with all the sensuous emotion of a cook, himself a gourmand, preparing another person's supper.

Their spirits rose again at the humorous aspect of the adventure. The Count ventured upon some rather risky jokes which were so neatly turned that no one could help smiling. Loiseau indulged in broader pleasantries and even these were not resented. Every-

one was thinking of Madame Loiseau's brutally frank remark :

" It's her trade, so why should she pick and choose ?"

Indeed, charming Madame Carré-Lamadon seemed to think that if she were in her place she would rather have him than another.

A plan of blockade was carefully considered, as if for the investing of a fortress. To each conspirator a separate rôle was assigned, including appropriate arguments and manœuvres. A plan of attack, with strategic openings and surprise methods of assault, was agreed upon with a view to forcing this citadel of flesh and blood to admit the enemy.

They were so deeply engrossed that they did not hear Boule de Suif come in, till, at the Count's whispered " Hush !", everyone looked up and saw her.

Conversation ceased abruptly and at first a feeling of embarrassment deterred them from addressing her. The Countess, however, was more of an adept than her companions in social insincerity.

" Was it a pretty christening ?" she asked.

Not without emotion, Boule de Suif described the whole proceedings, the congregation, the ceremony, and the church itself. She added :

" It does one good to say one's prayers now and then."

Up to luncheon time the ladies contented themselves with being pleasant to her, with the object of gaining her confidence and making her amenable to their advice. But as soon as they sat down to table the siege was opened. They began with a vague discussion of the virtue of self-sacrifice. Instances from antiquity were

quoted: Judith and Holofernes, then, with utter inconsequence, Lucretia and Sextus, and Cleopatra, admitting to her bed all the enemy generals and making them her obedient slaves. Next was unfolded a fantastic story, hatched in the imagination of these ignorant plutocrats, of how the Roman women betook themselves to Capua and lulled to sleep in their arms Hannibal, his officers and his phalanxes of mercenaries. They told of women who had stayed the tide of conquest, offering their own persons as a battlefield and making of their own beauty an effective weapon; heroines whose caresses had compassed the overthrow of the vilest and most hateful of mankind, and who had sacrificed their chastity in a fervour of vengeance and self-immolation.

All these stories were told with due regard to propriety and good taste, with frequent outbursts of studied enthusiasm calculated to excite to emulation.

By the time they had finished, one would have supposed that the whole duty of woman here below was the repeated sacrifice of her person, a continual surrender of herself to a licentious soldiery.

Deep in their meditations the two nuns did not seem to be listening and Boule de Suif said not a word.

All that afternoon they left her to her own reflections. Only, instead of addressing her as "Madame," as they had hitherto done, they now said simply "Mademoiselle," no one quite knew why, unless it was to detract from the position of respect to which she had attained, and to bring home to her the shame of her calling.

While the soup was being served, Monsieur Follenvie appeared again, and repeated the question of the previous evening:

"The Prussian officer wishes to know if Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset has changed her mind yet?"

" No," said Boule de Suif, curtly.

During dinner, the coalition showed signs of weakening. Loiseau made two or three unfortunate remarks. All the conspirators vainly racked their brains in search of fresh examples, when the Countess, probably without design, and simply with a vague idea of showing respect to Religion, questioned the elder nun about the main incidents in the lives of the Saints. It appeared that many of the Saints had been guilty of deeds which would be considered crimes in our eyes. But the Church makes no difficulty about granting absolution for heinous offences, provided that they are committed for the glory of God or the good of one's neighbour. Here was a powerful argument, and the Countess jumped at it. It was either a case of that tacit understanding, that veiled connivance, for which all who wear the Church's robes develop a special faculty, or simply the result of a fortunate lack of intelligence, an opportune stupidity. Whatever the cause, the old nun rendered yeoman's service to the intriguers. In spite of her apparent timidity, she showed herself bold, eloquent, forcible. She, for one, did not trouble to grope along the mazes of casuistry; her doctrine was as rigid as an iron bar; her faith was unswerving; her conscience knew no scruple. She regarded Abraham's sacrifice as perfectly natural, for she herself would have had no hesitation in slaying both father and mother at a command from on high. No act, she believed, could be displeasing to the Lord if the intention was praiseworthy. Taking advantage of the pious authority of

this unexpected ally, the Countess induced her to deliver an edifying exposition of the moral axiom: "The end justifies the means."

"Then, Sister," she said, "You believe that all means are acceptable to God and that He will pardon any act if only the motive be pure?"

"Who can doubt it, Madam? An act culpable in itself often becomes meritorious because of the idea which inspires it."

And they continued in this strain, interpreting the will of God, anticipating His judgments and involving Him in matters which were really no concern of His. And the whole drift of their discussion was veiled, insidious, discreet. Every word uttered by the holy woman in the nun's coif made a breach in the courtesan's fierce resistance. Presently the conversation took a somewhat different turn. She of the rosary spoke of the houses of her Order, her Superior, herself, her charming companion, her dear sister Saint Nicéphore. They had been summoned to Havre to nurse in the hospitals hundreds of soldiers, suffering from smallpox. She described these poor fellows, giving particulars of their disease. And while they were held up on their journey for a whim of this Prussian, scores of Frenchmen were perhaps dying, whom their ministrations might have saved. Nursing soldiers was her speciality. She had been in the Crimea, in Italy, in Austria. In relating her campaigns, she suddenly revealed herself as one of those nuns of fife and drum, whose destiny it is to follow the armies and bring in the wounded, cast up by the back-wash of battles, and whose word is more effective than a general's in subduing undisciplined

soldiers. She was a real Sister Rub-a-dub, and her worn face, seamed with countless wrinkles, was like a symbol of the havoc of war.

The effect of her speech seemed so admirable that when she ceased no one said another word. As soon as dinner was over, the whole party retired at once to their rooms and did not come down till rather late the next morning. Luncheon passed quietly. The seed, which had been sown on the previous evening, was given time to germinate and bear fruit.

In the afternoon, the Countess suggested a walk. The Count, as had been arranged, gave his arm to Boule de Suif and lingered with her behind the others. He adopted towards her that familiar, paternal, somewhat supercilious manner, with which men of a certain position treat young women of her class, calling her " my dear child " with the condescension arising from his social rank and his unquestioned respectability.

He went straight to the root of the matter:

" Then, you prefer to keep us here, exposed like yourself to all the outrages which would ensue if the Prussian troops suffered a reverse, rather than grant a favour which you have conceded so often as a matter of course?"

Boule de Suif made no reply.

He tried her with kindness, argument, appeals to sentiment, yet he never forgot his rank, even though obliged to pay court, to lavish compliments; in short, to make himself agreeable. He magnified the service she would render her companions and spoke of their gratitude; finally, with gay familiarity, he exclaimed:

" And you know, my dear, he will be able to boast of

having enjoyed a prettier girl than he could often find in his own country."

Boule de Suif still made no reply and caught up the others. As soon as she returned home she withdrew to her room and did not come down again. The rest of the party were greatly perturbed. What did she mean to do? If she still held out, it would be very awkward.

The dinner hour came, but they waited for her in vain. Then Monsieur Follenvie appeared and said that Mademoiselle Rousset was indisposed and that they might begin. They all picked up their ears. The Count went up to the inn-keeper and asked in a whisper: "Is it all right?" "Yes." From a sense of propriety, he said nothing to his companions, but he slightly nodded his head. Every one uttered a sigh of relief and every face lighted up. Loiseau exclaimed: "Glory be! I'll stand champagne, if there is any in the house!" and Madame Loiseau writhed in agony, when the host came back with four bottles. Everyone at once became voluble and noisy. They were bubbling over with joy. The Count appeared to awake to Madame Carré-Lamadon's charms; the manufacturer addressed compliments to the Countess. The tone of the conversation grew lively, merry and racy.

Suddenly, Loiseau raised his hands with an air of anxiety, and shouted: "Silence." Surprised, almost frightened, the whole party sat mute. He made a sign to them to keep still; stood in an attitude of attention, his eyes raised to the ceiling, and listened again. Then in his ordinary voice, he said: "Be easy; all is well." Slowly his meaning dawned upon them and they exchanged smiles.

A quarter of an hour later he went through the same performance, which he repeated at intervals throughout the evening. He pretended to be addressing questions to someone on the floor above, and proffering advice, which had a double meaning characteristic of his bagman's wit. With a sorrowful expression, he would sigh: "Poor girl," or he would murmur between his teeth as in a fury:

"Get out, you Prussian brute."

Sometimes, when the others were off their guard, he would cry repeatedly in a thrilling voice: "Have done! Have done!" adding, as if to himself: "I only hope we may see her again and that that scoundrel won't be the death of her."

Though these jests were in deplorable taste, everyone enjoyed them and no one was shocked. Like any other sentiment, virtuous indignation is the result of environment, and gradually an atmosphere had been created which was laden with obscene suggestion. At dessert, even the women, who had drunk a good deal and whose eyes were sparkling, made discreet but waggish allusions.

The Count, who preserved, even when he fell from grace, his grave and lofty bearing, drew a comparison, which was much relished, between their condition and that of ice-bound mariners at the Pole, rejoicing because Winter is over and the way to the South open once more.

Loiseau jumped up, a glass of champagne in his hand:

"I drink to our deliverance!" Everyone rose and drank the toast with acclamation. Even the two nuns

yielded to the importunity of the other ladies and took a sip of the bubbling wine, which they had never tasted before. They said it was like effervescent lemonade but admitted that it had a finer flavour.

Loiseau summed up the situation :

" What a pity we haven't a piano; we might have managed a quadrille."

Cornudet had not uttered a word or made a sign. He seemed, indeed, as if plunged in serious thought, and now and then with a furious gesture he tugged at his great beard, as if he wished to make it longer still. At last, towards midnight, as the party was about to break up, Loiseau reeled up to him and poked him in the ribs.

" You're not in good form this evening, old chap. Have you lost your tongue?"

Cornudet raised his head sharply and glaring ferociously at the company, said :

" I tell you that you have all done an infamous thing." He rose and made his way to the door.

" Infamous !" he repeated and disappeared.

The immediate effect of his words was to cast a blight on everyone. Loiseau was utterly taken aback and stood there like a fool. But he quickly recovered himself. Convulsed with laughter, he exclaimed :

" The grapes are sour, old boy; the grapes are sour."

As no one understood, he told his story of the mysteries of the corridor. There was a fresh outburst of gaiety. The ladies nearly died of laughing. The Count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed till they cried. They could not believe their ears.

" What ! you are sure? He really wanted to . . ."

" I tell you I saw it !"

"And she refused?"

"Yes, because the Prussian was in the room next to her."

"Is it possible?"

"I'll take my oath."

The Count suffocated with laughter and the manufacturer held his sides. Loiseau resumed:

"And now, you know why he didn't think it at all funny this evening!"

The three men exploded again, until they were out of breath and weak with laughing. Then they all went upstairs and the party dispersed.

Madame Loiseau, who was as spiteful as a stinging nettle, said to her husband as soon as they were in bed:

"That affected little minx, Madame Carré-Lamadon, was laughing on the wrong side of her mouth all the evening. When it comes to a uniform, you know, some women don't care whether it is French or Prussian; it's all one to them. Good Lord, isn't it revolting?"

All that night the darkened corridor was alive with rustling sounds, so light as to be almost inaudible, the pattering of bare feet, the faint creaking of boards. From the gleams of light that showed beneath the doors for a long time, it was obvious that no one went to sleep till a late hour. Champagne is said to make one restless.

Next morning, the snow glittered dazzlingly in the bright winter sun. The coach, ready at last, was standing at the door, while a flock of white pigeons, pink-eyed with black pupils, were preening their luxuriant plumage and stalking solemnly in and out between the legs of the six horses, picking up their sustenance.

Wrapped in his sheepskin, the driver was seated on the box, pulling at his pipe, and the delighted travellers were all of them busy packing up provisions for the rest of the journey. All they were now waiting for was Boule de Suif.

Presently she appeared. She seemed somewhat ill at ease and ashamed, and as she moved timidly towards her fellow travellers, they all unanimously turned away as if they had not seen her. The Count, with a dignified air, took his wife's arm and drew her away from that contaminating contact.

Boule de Suif stood for a moment in amazement, then plucking up courage, she greeted the manufacturer's wife with a humble " Good morning, Madam." The latter, however, merely returned an insolent little nod and a glance of virtuous indignation. Everyone seemed to have a great deal to do and held aloof from her, as if she had infection in her petticoats. And then they made a rush for the coach, so that Boule de Suif was the last to reach it and quietly slipped into the seat she had occupied during the first stage of her journey.

They pretended neither to see nor to recognise her, but Madame Loiseau shot an indignant glance at her from a distance, and whispered audibly to her husband: " I am glad I am not sitting next to her."

The heavy coach lurched off and the journey was resumed. At first everyone was silent. Boule de Suif did not venture to look up. She was disgusted with her companions and at the same time ashamed of having submitted to the defiling embraces of the Prussian officer, into whose arms she had been flung by these hypocrites.

Presently, turning to Madame Carré-Lamadon, the Countess broke the painful silence:

"I think you know Madame d'Etrelles?"

"Yes, she is a friend of mine."

"What a charming woman!"

"Perfectly delightful! Really distinguished, well-educated, and artistic to the fingertips. She sings divinely and draws exquisitely."

The manufacturer talked to the Count; above the rattling of the windows, a word was now and then audible — dividend warrant — fall due — premium— mature—

Loiseau, who had annexed the pack of old cards from the inn, greasy with five years contact with dirty tables, played bezique with his wife.

The nuns, taking the long rosaries hanging at their waists, crossed themselves, and their lips began to move with ever increasing speed, as though their muttered prayers were running a race. Every now and then they kissed a medallion, crossed themselves again, and resumed their rapid, continuous babbling.

Cornudet sat motionless, plunged in thought.

After they had been three hours or so on the way, Loiseau gathered up the cards, saying:

"I feel hungry!"

His wife produced a packet tied with string from which she took a piece of cold veal. She cut it into neat, thin slices and they both began to eat.

"Suppose we do the same," said the Countess. Her husband agreed and she unpacked the provisions brought for themselves and the Carré-Lamadons. They consisted of an oblong dish with a hare in earthenware



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on the lid, which was an indication of the contents, a savoury hare-pie, in which the dark flesh, mixed with other finely chopped meat, was set off by streaks of white fat. There was also a fine piece of Gruyère, wrapped in a newspaper with " Miscellaneous News " impressed on its greasy exterior.

The two nuns took out a piece of sausage smelling of garlic; while Cornudet, thrusting both hands at once into the wide pockets of his loose great coat, extracted from one four hard boiled eggs, from the other a crust of bread. Throwing the shells into the straw at his feet, he set to work on the eggs, scattering on his spreading beard yellow specks of yolk, which shone there, like stars.

When she got up that morning Boule de Suif had been too much flustered and agitated to think of anything. Choking with rage and indignation, she watched all these people calmly eating away. Seething with fury, she opened her mouth to tell them what she thought of them, and a torrent of abuse rose to her lips; but her exasperation strangled her utterance. No one gave her a look or a thought. She felt overwhelmed by the contempt of these miserable churls, these respectable people, who had first sacrificed her and then flung her away like a thing useless and unclean. And then she remembered her big basket full of good things which they had greedily devoured, her two fowls in shining jelly, her pâtés, her pears, her four bottles of Bordeaux. Her rage suddenly subsided like a snapping cord and she felt on the verge of tears. She made a violent effort to brace herself and swallowed down her sobs as a child does; but tears rose to her

eyes, glistened on her eyelashes, and soon two great drops rolled slowly down her cheeks. Then the tears came faster and faster, like drops of water trickling from a rock, and falling in regular succession on to her swelling bosom. She sat erect and looked straight before her, her face pale and set, in the hope that her distress would pass unnoticed. But the Countess remarked it and with a gesture drew her husband's attention to it. He shrugged his shoulders as if to say:

"Well, what of it? It's not my fault."

Madame Loiseau, with a silent laugh of mockery, murmured:

"She is crying for shame."

After wrapping up the remainder of their sausage, the two nuns returned to their prayers.

Cornudet, who was digesting his eggs, put up his long legs on the opposite seat, leant back with folded arms, and smiled like a man who has thought of a good joke. He began to whistle the Marseillaise.

Every face grew overcast. The song of the people certainly did not appeal to his companions in the least. They fidgetted nervously and each looked ready to howl, like a dog at the sound of a barrel-organ. He realised this, and went on for all that. He even hummed a verse:

"*Amour sacré de la Patrie,*
*Conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs,*
*Liberté, liberté chérie,*
*Combats avec tes défenseurs!*"

As the snow hardened, their progress became more rapid. All the way to Dieppe, throughout the long

weary hours of the journey; above the jolting of the coach, in the gathering gloom, in the subsequent deep darkness which filled the carriage, with savage resolution he kept up his monotonous, vindictive whistling. He forced their jaded, exasperated brains to follow the song from end to end, word by word, and note by note. All the time, Boule de Suif never ceased to weep, and now and then at a pause in the song, a sob that she could not repress was heard in the darkness.

# THE DOWRY

# THE DOWRY

No one was surprised at the marriage of Maître Simon Lebrument and Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier. Maître Lebrument had just acquired the practice of Maître Papillon, the notary. Money had, of course, to be found for the purchase, and Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier had three hundred thousand francs in portable form, in bank notes and in bonds payable to bearer.

Lebrument was a good-looking young fellow with an air about him. It smacked, no doubt, of the provincial lawyer, but still, it was certainly an air, and that was a rare quality in Boutigny-le-Rebours.

Mademoiselle Cordier was graceful and blooming, but her grace had a certain awkwardness; her bloom was not quite fresh. On the whole, however, she was an attractive and presentable girl.

The wedding turned the whole of Boutigny topsy-turvy. Congratulations were lavished upon the newly-wedded pair, who presently retired to enjoy their bliss in the privacy of their own house. Their honeymoon was to consist of a few days at home, followed by a little trip to Paris.

The tête à tête was all that was delightful. Maître Lebrument wooed his bride with infinite tact and delicacy. He had taken as his motto: "Everything comes to him who waits." He was at once patient and ardent, and his

methods were speedily crowned with success. After a few days Madame Lebrument worshipped her husband. She could not do without him; she wanted him near her all day long, while she caressed and embraced him and played with his hands, his beard, his nose. She would perch herself upon his knees, seize him by the ears and say:

"Now open your mouth and shut your eyes."

Confidingly he would open his mouth, half close his eyes, and be rewarded with a long and tender kiss which sent a thrill all down his spine. For his part, it seemed as if his two hands, his two lips, and his whole person, were quite inadequate for all the caresses he desired to lavish on his wife from dawn to dusk, and from dusk to dawn.

At the end of the week, he said to his young wife:

"If you like, we will go to Paris next Tuesday. We will play at being a pair of unmarried lovers and go to all the restaurants, theatres, music-halls, and everywhere."

She jumped for joy.

"Yes, yes! do let's go as soon as possible."

"Very well," he replied, "And there's one thing we mustn't forget. Mind you ask your father to have your dowry ready. I will take it along and seize the opportunity to pay Maître Papillon."

"I will tell him to-morrow morning," she said.

He caught her in his arms, and the playful love-making, in which she had learnt to revel during the past week, began again.

On the following Tuesday, her parents went to see

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their daughter and son-in-law off on their journey to the capital.

His father-in-law said to Maître Lebrument:

"Upon my word, it is scarcely prudent to carry so much money in your despatch case."

But the young notary smiled.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear sir; I am used to that sort of thing. You must know that in my profession I sometimes have a million or so on me. In this way, we shall avoid all sorts of tedious formalities and delays. Don't be in the least anxious."

The porter called out:

"Take your seats for Paris."

They jumped into a carriage where there were two old ladies. Lebrument murmured in his wife's ear:

"What a bore; I shan't be able to smoke."

She whispered back:

"I think it a bore, too, but not because of your cigar."

The engine whistled and the train started. The journey lasted an hour, during which they did not talk much, because the two old ladies remained wide awake.

In the station yard at Saint Lazare, Lebrument said to his wife:

"If you like, we will first go and have luncheon on the Boulevard, and then come back and quietly pick up our luggage and take it to the hotel."

She agreed with alacrity:

"O yes, let us lunch at a restaurant. Is it far?"

"Yes, some little way off, but we can take an omnibus."

" Why not a cab?" she asked in surprise.

He smiled and pretended to scold her.

" Is that your idea of economy? A cab for a five minutes' run, at six sous a minute. I see you don't mean to stint yourself."

" O, very well," she said, a little crestfallen.

A three-horse omnibus came lumbering along. Lebrument hailed it. The clumsy vehicle stopped. The young notary urged his wife forward and said hastily:

" You go inside; I'm going outside. I must have just one cigarette before luncheon."

There was no time to reply. The conductor had caught her by the arm to help her on to the step and had pushed her into the omnibus. She collapsed on to the seat, in utter bewilderment and watched the feet of her husband, as he ascended to the roof. She was jammed in between a fat man, who reeked of stale tobacco, and an old woman who smelt of dog. All the other passengers sat in a silent row; a grocer's boy; a working girl; an infantry sergeant; a gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles and a silk hat with an enormous brim, turned up on either side like the gutter on a roof; two ladies with a proud and peevish expression, whose pose seemed to say: " Here we are, but we are above this sort of thing"; two nuns; a bareheaded girl, and an undertaker's man. They looked like a set of caricatures, a collection of freaks, a series of comic studies of the human face, like those rows of grotesque dummies, which are set up as targets at fairs. The jolting of the omnibus tossed and jerked their heads and shook their flaccid cheeks. Stupified by the rattle of the wheels, they looked like somnolent idiots.

Madame Lebrument sat motionless, and a vague sense of depression stole over her.

" Why didn't he come inside with me?" she wondered. "He could so easily have sacrificed his cigarette."

The nuns stopped the omnibus and followed each other out, diffusing a stale odour of old clothes. The omnibus moved on, but was stopped again. A cook got in, red-faced and out of breath. She sat down with her basket of provisions on her lap. A strong smell of dishwater filled the omnibus.

" It is further than I expected," thought Jeanne.

The undertaker's man got out; his place was taken by a coachman, smelling of the stable. The bare-headed girl was succeeded by a porter from whom emanated a strong odour of perspiration. Jeanne felt uneasy and downhearted, ready to burst into tears, she hardly knew why.

Other passengers came and went. The omnibus jolted on through endless streets, stopped at all its halting places and went on again.

" What a long way it is!" said Jeanne to herself. " I do hope he hasn't forgotten or fallen asleep. The last few days have been very tiring."

By degrees all the other passengers had left the omnibus. She remained alone, absolutely alone. The conductor called out:

" Vaugirard!"

As she did not move, he repeated:

" Vaugirard!"

She stared at him, realizing that his remark was addressed to her, as there was no one else in the omnibus. The man repeated for the third time:

" Vaugirard!"

" Where are we?" she asked.

" At Vaugirard, of course," he replied in a surly voice, " I have called it out a dozen times."

" Is it far from the Boulevard?"

" Which Boulevard?"

" The Boulevard des Italiens."

" We passed it long ago."

" O, really? Then will you please tell my husband? "

" Your husband? Where is he?"

" On the roof, of course."

" On the roof? There hasn't been anyone up there for ever so long."

" What!" she exclaimed with a gesture of horror. " It's impossible. He got on to the omnibus with me. Please look again. He must be there."

The conductor began to make insinuations:

" Come, come, young woman, enough said. If you have lost one man, you'll find plenty more. Clear out. Nothing doing. You'll pick up another in the street."

Tears rose to her eyes.

" You are mistaken," she exclaimed, "I assure you, you are mistaken. He had a large despatch case under his arm."

The conductor burst out laughing.

" A large despatch case? Yes, I remember. He got down at the Madeleine. It's all one. He has given you the slip. Ha! ha."

The omnibus was standing still. She got down and, in spite of herself instinctively glanced at the roof of

the omnibus. There was not a soul on it. At that she burst into a loud passion of weeping, without caring who saw or heard her.

"What is to become of me?" she sobbed.

An inspector came up to her:

"What is the matter?"

"Here's a lady, whose husband has deserted her on the way," the conductor replied jeeringly.

"Is that all? Then get on with your work," said the inspector, turning on his heel.

She walked straight on, too utterly bewildered and distressed to realize what had befallen her. Where was she to go? What was she to do? What had become of him? What could be the cause of such a mistake, such an oversight, such forgetfulness, such incredible absentmindedness?

She had two francs in her pocket. To whom could she turn? Suddenly she thought of her cousin Barral, branch clerk at the Admiralty. She had just enough money for her cab and she drove straight to his house. She met him on the doorstep, just as he was leaving for office. Like Lebrument he carried a large despatch case under his arm.

"Henry!" she cried, jumping out of the cab.

He stood still in amazement.

"Jeanne! You here? All alone? What are you doing? Where have you come from?"

With her eyes full of tears she faltered:

"I have just lost my husband."

"Lost him? Where?

"On an omnibus."

"On an omnibus? My dear!"

Through her tears she poured out her story, and he listened, his mind working busily.

"Did he seem quite himself this morning?" he asked.

"Yes."

"That's good. Had he much money on him?"

"Yes, he had my dowry."

"Your dowry? All of it?"

"Every penny. He meant to pay for the practice he has just bought."

"Well, my dear little cousin, at this very moment your husband is probably scuttling across the frontier into Belgium."

Even then she did not grasp his meaning. She stammered:

"My husband—what do you mean?"

"I mean that he has made a clean sweep of all your money—just that."

She stood rooted to the spot. Then, half-strangled with emotion, she gasped:

"Then he must . . . he must be . . . a scoundrel."

The strain was too much for her; she threw herself sobbing into her cousin's arms. A little crowd began to collect, so he gently pushed her inside the house, and with his arm round her waist, supported her up the stairs.

When the door was opened, he said to the astonished maid:

"Sophie, run over to the restaurant and bring luncheon for two. I'm not going to office to-day."

# THE PATRON

# THE PATRON

NEVER would he have dreamed of rising to such heights! The son of a country bailiff, Jean Marin, like many others, betook himself to the Latin Quarter, there to study law. At the different bars which he frequented he made the acquaintance of a set of loquacious students, who drank beer and spouted politics. They inspired in him such admiration that he used to follow them from café to café, even paying their score when he was in funds.

In due course he was called to the Bar, but the suits he pleaded were invariably unsuccessful. Then, one morning, he saw in the newspapers that one of his old comrades of the Latin Quarter had been elected Deputy. Once more he resumed the rôle of faithful hound, of friend who does the dirty work, who comes when he is called and is treated without any ceremony whatever. As it happened, by a turn of the Parliamentary wheel, his Deputy became a Minister and six months later Jean Marin was appointed a State Counsel.

At first he was nearly off his head with pride. He paraded the streets for the pure joy of showing himself, as if the mere sight of him were sufficient to reveal his new dignity. He could not speak to a tradesman or a newspaper boy, or even a cab driver, without finding

occasion to say in connection with the most irrelevant matters :

" A State Counsel, like myself . . ."

Presently, as a natural result of his exalted position, his professional instincts, his idea of what was proper for an influential man of generous disposition, he became obsessed with a passionate desire to offer his patronage. With inexhaustible liberality, he seized every opportunity of pressing his services upon everyone. If he met an acquaintance on the Boulevard, he would hail him joyfully, seize him by the hand and ask after his health. Then, without any prompting, he would exclaim :

" You know I am a State Counsel and entirely at your service. If I can be of use to you in any way, do not hesitate to command me. In my position, one's influence can do a good deal."

Then he would rush his friend into a café and call for pen, ink and paper :

" Just one sheet, waiter, simply for a letter of recommendation."

He would dash off letters of recommendation at the rate of ten, twenty or fifty a day. He wrote them here, there and everywhere—at the Café Américain, Bignon's, Tortoni's, the Maison Dorée, the Café Riche, the Helder, the Café Anglais, the Napolitain. They were addressed to all the officials of the Republic, from Justices of Peace to Ministers of State. And he was happy, exquisitely happy.

One morning as he left home for the office of the State Council it came on to rain. He thought of taking a cab but decided not to do so and continued his way

on foot. The shower became a deluge. Soon the pavements were running with water and the roads were flooded. Monsieur Marin was obliged to take refuge under a portico. An old, whitehaired priest was already sheltering there. Before his appointment as State Counsel, Monsieur Marin had had a dislike for the clergy. But ever since a cardinal had courteously consulted him on a difficult question he treated them with consideration.

The rain fell in torrents and at last the two men were compelled to take refuge in the porter's lodge to avoid being splashed with mud. Monsieur Marin, who was always dying to talk, for the sake of showing off his importance, said:

"What disgusting weather, sir!"

The old priest nodded:

"Yes, very disagreeable indeed, when one comes up to Paris for a few days only."

"Ah, you are from the country?"

"Yes, I am only passing through."

"It must be very unpleasant to have bad weather, when one is in town just for a few days. We officials, who live here all the year round, hardly notice it."

The priest made no reply. He was looking out at the street and saw that the rain was abating. Suddenly making up his mind, he gathered up his cassock, as women gather up their skirts to step across a gutter. Seeing his intention, Monsieur Marin protested:

"You will get drenched, sir. Wait a few moments more; the rain is going to stop."

The old gentleman paused, as if undecided, and then replied:

"The fact is I am in a great hurry. I have a pressing engagement."

Monsieur Marin seemed deeply concerned.

"But you will get absolutely soaked. May I ask which way you are going?"

After a little hesitation the priest answered:

"I am going in the direction of the Palais Royal."

"In that case, if you will allow me, I will share my umbrella with you. I am a State Counsel and am just on my way to office."

The old priest looked up and shot a glance at his companion:

"Many thanks, sir; I accept with pleasure."

Monsieur Marin took the priest's arm and off they went. He guided him, and watched over him and gave him good advice.

"Mind that gutter, sir. Keep out of the way of carriage wheels or you will be splashed from head to foot. Look out for people's umbrellas. Nothing is more dangerous for the eyes than the spike of an umbrella rib. Women are the worst offenders. They never look where they are going and poke the points of their parasols or umbrellas right in your face. They go peacocking along all over the road and pavement, and never get out of anyone's way as if the whole place belonged to them. It seems to me that their education has been much neglected."

And Monsieur Marin burst into a laugh.

The priest made no reply. He walked along somewhat bent, carefully picking his way, so as not to soil his boots or cassock.

" No doubt," Monsieur Marin resumed, " you have come to Paris for a little change?"

" No, I am here on business."

" Indeed. Is your business important? Might I venture to ask what it is? If I can be of use to you, I am quite at your service."

The priest seemed embarrassed. He murmured:

" O, it's just a small personal concern, a little difficulty with my bishop. It would not interest you. It's a . . . a domestic matter, a question of ecclesiastical discipline."

" But these are just the things," exclaimed Monsieur Marin eagerly, " that come within the sphere of the State Council. If such is the case, pray command me."

" Yes, you are right, and it is to the State Council that I am going. You are much too good. I have to see Monsieur Lerepère and Monsieur Savon and perhaps Monsieur Petitpas as well."

Monsieur Marin stood still:

" Why, they are all friends of mine, very good friends and excellent colleagues, perfectly charming people. I will recommend you warmly to all three of them. Rely upon me."

The priest thanked him with a great show of deprecating gratitude. Monsieur Marin was enchanted:

" You may congratulate yourself on a real stroke of luck, abbé. Wait and see; wait and see. Thanks to me, your little affair will be settled in no time."

They reached the office of the State Council. Monsieur Marin took the priest up to his private room,

gave him a chair by the fire, and seating himself at the table began to write:

"My dear colleague,

Permit me to commend to you most warmly a most worthy, deserving and venerable ecclesiastic, the Reverend . . ."

He stopped to ask:

"Your name, please?"

"Ceinture."

Monsieur Marin resumed his writing:

"The Reverend Abbé Ceinture, who desires your kind offices in a little matter which he will explain to you. I am happy to have the opportunity, my dear colleague, etc."

Having written the three letters, he handed them to his protégé, who went off with a thousand asservations of gratitude.

. . . . . .

Monsieur Marin finished his work, went home, spent the rest of the day quietly, slept peacefully, woke up in excellent spirits the next morning and called for his newspapers.

The first one he opened was a radical journal. He read as follows:

"OUR CLERGY AND OUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

"Shall we never have done recording the misdeeds of our clergy? A certain priest of the name of Ceinture, convicted of plotting against the present

Government, accused of unseemly conduct, which we cannot even hint at, suspected, moreover, of being a former Jesuit in the guise of a simple priest, suspended by his Bishop for reasons unfit for publication, and summoned to Paris to explain his conduct, has found an ardent champion in a State Counsel named Marin, who has had no hesitation in providing this cassocked scoundrel with the most glowing letters of recommendation to all his colleagues, officials of the Republic.

We draw the Minister's attention to the unjustifiable attitude adopted by this State Counsel."

Monsieur Marin leaped out of bed, dressed and hurried off to his colleague Petitpas, who said:

"My good man, what possessed you to give that old schemer a letter to me?"

"Let me explain," gasped Monsieur Marin, utterly abashed. "The fact is, he took me in completely. He looked so respectable; he made a fool of me. I hope you will have him punished, severely punished. I will write about it myself. Tell me the proper person to address in order to have him punished. I will take it to the Attorney General and the Archbishop of Paris; yes, I'll take it to the Archbishop."

Impulsively seating himself at Monsieur Petitpas's desk, he wrote as follows:

"Monseigneur,

I have the honour to inform your Grace that I have been the victim of the intrigues and falsehoods of a certain priest of the name of Ceinture, who

has abused my confidence. Deceived by this priest's lying allegations, I ventured, etc."

After he had signed and sealed the letter, he turned to his friend:

"Let this be a warning to you, my dear fellow, never to write a letter of recommendation for anybo[illegible]"

# ROSE

# ROSE

THE two ladies, alone in their great landau, which was laden with bouquets like a gigantic basket, seemed as if snowed under by layers of flowers. On the front seat stood two small white satin baskets full of Nice violets. The bearskin carriage rug was hidden beneath masses of roses, mimosa, stocks, marguerites, tuberoses, orange blossom, tied together in bunches with silken favours, and seeming almost to crush the fragile forms of the two ladies. Nothing of them was visible in all this wealth of colour and fragrance, except their shoulders and arms and a glimpse of their bodices, one blue, the other mauve. The coachman's whip was encased in anemones; the harness was decked with wallflowers, and mignonette was twined round the spokes of the wheels. The carriage lamps had been removed to make way for two huge round bouquets, which looked like a pair of weird eyes belonging to a moving and garlanded monster. The landau bowled at a smart trot along the route of the procession, the Rue d'Antibes. It was one in a stream of carriages, similarly decorated and all of them occupied by ladies, hidden beneath masses of violets. It was the Battle of Flowers at Cannes.

They reached the Boulevard de la Foncière, where the battle was in full swing. A double row of flower-decked carriages, like an endless ribbon, kept coming and going, up and down the long avenue.

Flowers were flung from carriage to carriage; they flew through the air in volleys, striking against rosy cheeks, then fluttering and falling on to the dusty road, where a host of urchins were gathering them up. The pavements were packed with a noisy, good-humoured crowd, watching the proceedings, and roughly kept in check by the mounted police, who rode up and down, as if to prevent the vulgar throng on foot from mingling with the wealthy carriage people.

All the ladies in the carriages were calling and nodding to their friends, and pelting one another with roses. One party of pretty young women, dressed in the red livery of Mephistopheles, was a focus of attraction. A merry gentleman, not unlike the portraits of Henri IV, had a large bouquet attached to an elastic, which he kept playfully flinging in all directions. Afraid of being hit, the women covered their eyes, and the men lowered their heads. But after describing a graceful curve, the missile returned swiftly and obediently to the hand of its owner, who immediately tossed it again towards some new face.

The two ladies rapidly disposed of their ammunition and were bombarded with bouquets in return. But after an hour or so, they tired of the battle, and ordered their coachman to drive along the Route du Golfe Juan, which skirts the seashore.

The sun was setting behind the Esterels, and the long, irregular ridge of the mountains stood out in black relief against the flaming background. The ocean stretched away calm and blue and translucent, to the horizon, where sky and sea melted into one. The fleet lay at anchor in the bay, motionless like a herd of

monstrous beasts of the Apocalypse, iron-clad, hump-backed, with slender feathery masts, and eyes that would gleam at nightfall.

The two ladies, lying back beneath the heavy bear-skin, languidly surveyed the scene. At last one of them broke the silence.

" How perfect some evenings are. Everything seems just right. Don't you think so, Margot?"

" Yes, as far as it goes," replied her companion, " but there is always something lacking."

" What do you mean? Personally, I feel absolutely happy and without a wish in the world."

" That's because it hasn't occurred to you. Physically we may be drugged with happiness, and yet we always yearn for something more, something to satisfy the heart."

Her friend smiled. " You mean . . . love."

" Yes."

They sat silently gazing straight in front of them. Then Marguerite murmured:

" To me, love is the only thing that makes life tolerable. I must feel myself loved, even if it is only by a dog. After all, whatever you may say, Simone, we women are all the same."

" I do not admit it, my dear. I would rather not be loved at all, than have to put up with the first-comer. For instance, do you suppose I should enjoy being loved by . . . by . . ."

She cast a sweeping glance over the wide prospect, seeking an illustration. After contemplating the landscape, her eyes were caught by the two brass buttons shining on the back of the coachman's coat. She

laughingly completed her sentence. "For instance, by my coachman."

Margot smiled faintly, then, in a low voice she declared:

"I assure you that it can be very good fun to have a servant in love with you. It has happened to me two or three times. The odd way in which they roll their eyes at you makes you nearly die of laughing. Of course, the more they are in love with you, the more exacting you are. Eventually you dismiss them on some pretext or other, because, if anyone noticed it, you would be laughed at."

Simone listened, looking straight ahead of her. Then she replied:

"No, I am sure I could not be content with my footman's heart. But tell me, how did you know that they were in love with you?"

"Just as with other men. As soon as they became stupid."

"Men never strike me as being stupid, when they fall in love with me."

"O, they are idiots, my dear, unable to talk, unable to answer or to understand the simplest thing."

"But when your servants fell in love with you, how did it affect you? What did you feel like? Were you touched, or were you flattered?"

"Touched, certainly not. But flattered, yes, just a little flattered. A man's love is always flattering, whoever he is."

"My dear Margot!"

"I assure you it is so, my dear. Now listen, and I'll tell you an odd experience I had. It will give you

an idea of the curious mixed feelings we have in a case like that. Three years ago last autumn, I found myself without a maid. I had tried five or six, one after the other, and everyone of them hopelessly incapable. I was beginning to despair of ever finding a maid to suit me, when I saw in a newspaper an advertisement of a girl who professed to have excellent references, to be a good needlewoman and hairdresser and able to speak English. I wrote to the address she gave. The next day she came to see me. She was rather tall, slim, and pale, and seemed very shy. She had fine black eyes and a charming complexion, and I took a fancy to her at once. I asked for her references. She produced a character written in English, having, she said, just left Lady Rymwell with whom she had been for ten years. The character stated that the girl was leaving of her own accord in order to return to France, and that the only complaint her mistress had had to make of her throughout her long term of service was a touch of French coquetry. Smiling a little at the English prudery of the phrase I engaged the maid on the spot. She entered my service that same day. Her name was Rose.

" In a month's time I was devoted to her. She was a treasure, a pearl, a miracle. She had exquisite taste in hair-dressing, could arrange lace on a hat better than a first-class milliner and she could even dressmake. I was amazed at her versatility and I had never been so perfectly maided in my life. She dressed me with swiftness and a lightness of touch that were astonishing. She never allowed her fingers to come in contact with my skin, and if there is one thing I particularly

dislike it is the touch of a servant's hand. Soon I became thoroughly lazy in my habits, because it was a positive pleasure to be dressed from head to foot, from my chemise to my gloves, by this tall, shy girl, who was always on the verge of a blush, and who never uttered a word. After my bath, she would rub me and massage me while I lay dozing on the sofa. Really, I looked upon her more as a humble friend than as a mere servant.

" Well, one morning the house porter asked, with an air of mystery, if he might speak to me. I was surprised, but I let him come in. He was a man in whom we had implicit confidence, an old soldier who used to be my husband's orderly. He seemed embarrassed about what he had to say. But he at last plucked up his courage and faltered:

" ' If you please, Ma'am, the district commissary of police is downstairs.'

" ' What on earth does he went? ' I asked sharply.

" ' He wants to search the house.'

" I admit that the police are useful, but I detest them. To my mind there is something ignoble in the profession. I was hurt and annoyed.

" ' Search the house? ' I replied. ' For what purpose? Tell him he cannot come in.'

" ' He declares that there is a criminal here in hiding,' replied the porter.

" At this I felt really alarmed. I sent for the commissary and asked for an explanation. He was quite a well-bred man, and had the Legion of Honour. First of all he apologised; then he announced that there was a convict among my servants.

" Imagine my disgust! I replied that I would answer for every servant in the house, and I accounted for each one of them.

" ' The house porter, Pierre Courtin, an old soldier.'

" ' That's not my man.'

" ' The coachman, François Pingau, a peasant from Champagne, son of one of my father's farmers.'

" ' Nor is he.'

" ' The groom, also from Champagne, the son of another peasant whom I know, and the footman whom you have just seen.'

" ' It's neither of those.'

" ' Then it is obvious that you have made a mistake.'

" ' I beg your pardon, Madam, but I am convinced that I have made no mistake. As it is a question of a dangerous criminal, I must ask you to have the goodness to assemble your entire domestic staff in the presence of both of us.'

" At first I refused, but in the end I consented, and I ordered all my servants, both men and women, to come up to my room.

" The commissary gave them one glance.

" ' They are not all here.'

" ' I beg your pardon, there is no one else except my maid; you can't possibly mistake her for a convict."

" ' May I see her too? '

" ' Certainly.'

" I rang for Rose, who answered the bell at once. She had scarcely entered the room, when the commis-

sary made a sign to two men who were hidden behind the door, and whom I had not seen before; they threw themselves upon her, seized her hands and tied them together.

" With a cry of rage, I was darting forward to the rescue, when the commissary intervened.

" ' This supposed girl, Madam, is a man called Jean Nicolas Lecapet, who was sentenced to death in 1879 for rape and murder. His sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. Four months ago he escaped, and we have been hunting for him ever since.'

" I was speechless with horror. I could not believe my ears. But the commissary continued with a smile.

" ' The only proof I can give you is this. He has tattoo marks on his right arm.'

" His sleeve was turned back. It was perfectly true. The police officer had the bad taste to add:

" ' You can trust us for the other details of identity.'

" And so they took my maid away.

" Well, you will hardly believe it, but the feeling that was uppermost in my mind was not resentment at having been tricked and imposed upon, and made a fool of, nor shame at having been dressed and undressed, touched and handled by this man, but a deep feeling of humiliation—a sense of insult to my sex. Do you understand? "

" I can't say I do quite."

" Just consider. The man had been sentenced . . . for rape. And the thought . . . the thought of his victim . . . was a humiliation for me. Now, do you understand? "

Simone made no reply. With a curious expression in her eyes, she sat gazing intently at the two shining buttons on the coachman's livery, and she was smiling that sphinx-like smile that sometimes hovers upon a woman's lips.

# THE NECKLACE

# THE NECKLACE

SHE was one of those pretty and charming girls who, by some freak of destiny, are born into families that have always held subordinate appointments. Possessing neither dowry nor expectations, she had no hope of meeting some man of wealth and distinction, who would understand her, fall in love with her, and wed her. So she consented to marry a small clerk in the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly, because she could not afford to be elegant, but she felt as unhappy, as if she had married beneath her. Woman are dependent neither on caste nor ancestry. With them, beauty, grace, and charm take the place of birth and breeding. In their case, natural delicacy, instinctive refinement and adaptability constitute their claims to aristocracy and raise girls of the lower classes to an equality with the greatest of great ladies. She was eternally restive under the conviction that she had been born to enjoy every refinement and luxury. Depressed by her humble surroundings, the sordid walls of her dwelling, its worn furniture and shabby hangings were a torment to her. Details which another woman of her class would scarcely have noticed, tortured her and filled her with resentment. The sight of her little Breton maid-of-all-work roused in her forlorn repinings and frantic yearnings.

She pictured to herself silent antechambers, upholstered with Oriental tapestry, lighted by great bronze standard lamps, while two tall footmen in knee breeches slumbered in huge arm-chairs, overcome by the oppressive heat from the stove. She dreamed of spacious drawing-rooms with hangings of antique silk, and beautiful tables laden with priceless ornaments; of fragrant and coquettish boudoirs, exquisitely adapted for afternoon chats with intimate friends, men of note and distinction, whose attentions are coveted by every woman.

She would sit down to dinner at the round table, its cloth already three days old, while her husband, seated opposite to her, removed the lid from the soup tureen and exclaimed, " Pot au feu! How splendid! My favourite soup! " But her own thoughts were dallying with the idea of exquisite dinners and shining silver, in rooms, whose tapestried walls were gay with antique figures and grotesque birds in fairy forests. She would dream of delicious dishes served on wonderful plate, of soft, whispered nothings, which evoke a sphinx-like smile, while one trifles with the pink flesh of a trout or the wing of a plump pullet.

She had no pretty gowns, no jewels, nothing--and yet she cared for nothing else. She felt that it was for such things as these that she had been born. What joy it would have given her to attract, to charm, to be envied by women, courted by men! She had a wealthy friend, who had been at school at the same convent, but after a time she refused to go and see her, because she suffered so acutely after each visit. She spent whole days in tears of grief, regret, despair and misery.

One evening her husband returned home in triumph with a large envelope in his hand.

" Here is something for you," he cried.

Hastily she tore open the envelope and drew out a printed card with the following inscription :

" The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame George Ramponneau have the honour to request the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at an At Home at the Education Office on Monday, January 18th."

Instead of being delighted as her husband had hoped, she flung the invitation irritably on the table, exclaiming :

" What good is that to me? "

" Why, my dear, I thought you would be pleased. You never go anywhere, and this is a really splendid chance for you. I had no end of trouble in getting it. Everybody is trying to get an invitation. It's very select, and only a few invitations are issued to the clerks. You will see all the officials there."

She looked at him in exasperation, and exclaimed petulantly :

" What do you expect me to wear at a reception like that? "

He had not considered the matter, but he replied hesitatingly :

" Why, that dress you always wear to the theatre seems to me very nice indeed . . . "

He broke off. To his horror and consternation he saw that his wife was in tears. Two large drops were rolling slowly down her cheeks.

" What on earth is the matter? " he gasped.

With a violent effort she controlled her emotion, and drying her wet cheeks said in a calm voice:

"Nothing. Only I haven't a frock, and so I can't go to the reception. Give your invitation to some friend in your office, whose wife is better dressed than I am."

He was greatly distressed.

"Let us talk it over, Matilda. How much do you think a proper frock would cost, something quite simple that would come in useful for other occasions afterwards?"

She considered the matter for a few moments, busy with her calculations, and wondering how large a sum she might venture to name without shocking the little clerk's instincts of economy and provoking a prompt refusal.

"I hardly know," she said at last, doubtfully, "But I think I could manage with four hundred francs."

He turned a little pale. She had named the exact sum that he had saved for buying a gun and making up Sunday shooting parties the following summer with some friends, who were going to shoot larks in the plain of Nanterre.

But he replied:

"Very well, I'll give you four hundred francs. But mind you buy a really handsome gown."

. . . . . .

The day of the party drew near. But although her gown was finished Madame Loisel seemed depressed and dissatisfied.

"What is the matter?" asked her husband one

evening, " You haven't been at all yourself the last three days."

She answered: " It vexes me to think that I haven't any jewellery to wear, not even a brooch. I shall feel like a perfect pauper. I would almost rather not go to the party."

" You can wear some fresh flowers. They are very fashionable this year. For ten francs you can get two or three splendid roses."

She was not convinced.

" No, there is nothing more humiliating than to have an air of poverty among a crowd of rich women."

" How silly you are! " exclaimed her husband. " Why don't you ask your friend, Madame Forestier, to lend you some jewellery. You know her quite well enough for that."

She uttered a cry of joy.

" Yes, of course, it never occurred to me."

The next day she paid her friend a visit and explained her predicament.

Madame Forestier went to her wardrobe, took out a large jewel case and placed it open before her friend.

" Help yourself, my dear."

Madame Loisel saw some bracelets, a pearl necklace, a Venetian cross exquisitely worked in gold and jewels. She tried on these ornaments in front of the mirror and hesitated, reluctant to take them off and give them back.

" Have you nothing else? " she kept asking.

" O yes, look for yourself. I don't know what you would prefer."

At length, she discovered a black satin case containing

a superb diamond necklace, and her heart began to beat with frantic desire. With trembling hands she took it out, fastened it over her high-necked gown, and stood gazing at herself in rapture.

Then, in an agony of doubt, she said:

"Will you lend me this? I shouldn't want anything else."

"Yes, certainly."

She threw her arms round her friend's neck, kissed her effusively, and then fled with her treasure.

It was the night of the reception. Madame Loisel's triumph was complete. All smiles and graciousness, in her exquisite gown, she was the prettiest woman in the room. Her head was in a whirl of joy. The men stared at her and enquired her name and begged for an introduction, while the junior staff asked her for waltzes. She even attracted the attention of the minister himself.

Carried away by her enjoyment, glorying in her beauty and her success, she threw herself ecstatically into the dance. She moved as in a beatific dream, wherein were mingled all the homage and admiration she had evoked, all the desires she had kindled, all that complete and perfect triumph, so dear to a woman's heart.

It was close on four before she could tear herself away. Ever since midnight her husband had been dozing in a little, deserted drawing-room together with three other men, whose wives were enjoying themselves immensely.

He threw [illegible] outdoor wraps round her shoulders, unpretentious, every-day garments, whose shabbiness

contrasted strangely with the elegance of her ball dress. Conscious of the incongruity, she was eager to be gone, in order to escape the notice of the other women in their luxurious furs. Loisel tried to restrain her.

" Wait here while I fetch a cab. You will catch cold outside."

But she would not listen to him and hurried down the staircase. They went out into the street, but there was no cab to be seen. They continued their search, vainly hailing drivers, whom they caught sight of in the distance. Shivering with cold and in desperation they made their way towards the Seine. At last, on the quay, they found one of those old vehicles, which are only seen in Paris after nightfall, as if ashamed to display their shabbiness by daylight.

The cab took them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs and they gloomily climbed the stairs to their dwelling. All was over for her. As for him, he was thinking that he would have to be in office by ten o'clock.

She took off her wraps in front of the mirror, for the sake of one last glance at herself in all her glory. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The diamonds were no longer round her neck.

" What is the matter? " asked her husband, who was already half undressed.

She turned to him in horror. " I . . . I . . . have lost Madame Forestier's necklace."

He started in dismay. " What? Lost the necklace? Impossible."

They searched the pleats of the gown, the folds of the cloak and all the pockets, but in vain.

" You are sure you had it on when you came away from the ball? "

" Yes, I remember feeling it in the lobby at the Education Office."

" But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it drop. It must be in the cab."

" Yes. I expect it is. Did you take the number?"

" No. Did you? "

" No."

They gazed at each other, utterly appalled. In the end, Loisel put on his clothes again.

" I will go over the ground that we covered on foot and see if I cannot find it."

He left the house. Lacking the strength to go to bed, unable to think, she collapsed into a chair and remained there in her evening gown, without a fire.

About seven o'clock her husband returned. He had not found the diamonds.

He applied to the police; advertised a reward in the newspapers, made enquiries of all the hackney cab offices; he visited every place that seemed to hold out a vestige of hope.

His wife waited all day long in the same distracted condition, overwhelmed by this appalling calamity.

Loisel returned home in the evening, pale and hollow-cheeked. His efforts had been in vain.

" You must write to your friend," he said, " and tell her that you have broken the catch of the necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to think things over."

She wrote a letter to his dictation.

. . . . . .

After a week had elapsed, they gave up all hope. Loisel, who looked five years older, said:

"We must take steps to replace the diamonds."

On the following day they took the empty case to the jeweller, whose name was inside the lid. He consulted his books.

"The necklace was not bought here, Madam; I can only have supplied the case."

They went from jeweller to jeweller, in an endeavour to find a necklace exactly like the one they had lost, comparing their recollections. Both of them were ill with grief and despair.

At last in a shop in the Palais Royal they found a diamond necklace, which seemed to them exactly like the other. Its price was forty thousand francs. The jeweller agreed to sell it to them for thirty-six. They begged him not to dispose of it for three days, and they stipulated for the right to sell it back for thirty-four thousand francs, if the original necklace was found before the end of February.

Loisel had eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. The balance of the sum he proposed to borrow. He raised loans in all quarters, a thousand francs from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave promissory notes, agreed to exorbitant terms, had dealings with usurers, and with all the money-lending hordes. He compromised his whole future, and had to risk his signature, hardly knowing if he would be able to honour it. Overwhelmed by the prospect of future suffering, the black misery which was about to come upon him, the physical privations and moral torments, he went to fetch the new necklace, and



GIRLS CO

laid his thirty-six thousand francs down on the jeweller's counter.

When Madame Loisel brought back the necklace, Madame Forestier said reproachfully:

"You ought to have returned it sooner; I might have wanted to wear it."

To Madame Loisel's relief she did not open the case. Supposing she had noticed the exchange, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Perhaps she would have taken her for a thief.

. . . . . .

Madame Loisel now became acquainted with the horrors of extreme poverty. She made up her mind to it, and played her part heroically. This appalling debt had to be paid, and pay it she would. The maid was dismissed; the flat was given up, and they moved to a garret. She undertook all the rough household work and the odious duties of the kitchen. She washed up after meals and ruined her pink finger nails scrubbing greasy dishes and saucepans. She washed the linen, the shirts and the dusters, and hung them out on the line to dry. Every morning she carried down the sweepings to the street, and brought up the water, pausing for breath at each landing. Dressed like a working woman, she went with her basket on her arm to the greengrocer, the grocer and the butcher, bargaining, wrangling, and fighting for every farthing.

Each month some of the promissory notes had to be redeemed, and others renewed, in order to gain time.

Her husband spent his evenings working at some

tradesman's accounts, and at night he would often copy papers at five sous a page.

This existence went on for ten years.

At the end of that time they had paid off everything to the last penny, including the usurious rates and the accumulations of interest.

Madame Loisel now looked an old woman. She had become the typical poor man's wife, rough, coarse, hardbitten. Her hair was neglected; her skirts hung awry; and her hands were red. Her voice was no longer gentle, and she washed down the floors vigorously. But now and then, when her husband was at office, she would sit by the window and her thoughts would wander back to that far-away evening, the evening of her beauty and her triumph.

What would have been the end of it if she had not lost the necklace? Who could say? Who could say? How strange, how variable are the chances of life! How small a thing can serve to save or ruin you!

One Sunday she went for a stroll in the Champs Elysées, for the sake of relaxation after the week's work, and she caught sight of a lady with a child. She recognised Madame Forestier, who looked as young, as pretty, and as attractive as ever. Madame Loisel felt a thrill of emotion. Should she speak to her? Why not? Now that the debt was paid, why should she not tell her the whole story? She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

Her friend did not recognise her and was surprised at being addressed so familiarly by this homely person.

"I am afraid I do not know you—you must have made a mistake," she said hesitatingly.

" No. I am Matilda Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

" O my poor, dear Matilda, how you have changed !"

" Yes, I have been through a very hard time since I saw you last, no end of trouble, and all through you."

" Through me? What do you mean? "

" You remember the diamond necklace you lent me to wear at the reception at the Education Office? "

" Yes. Well? "

" Well, I lost it."

" I don't understand; you brought it back to me."

" What I brought you back was another one, exactly like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You will understand that it was not an easy matter for people like us, who hadn't a penny. However, it's all over now. I can't tell you what a relief it is."

Madame Forestier stopped dead.

" You mean to say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine? "

" Yes. And you never noticed it? They were certainly very much alike."

She smiled with ingenuous pride and satisfaction.

Madame Forestier seized both her hands in great distress.

" O my poor, dear Matilda. Why, mine were only imitation. At the most they were worth five hundred francs! "

# HAPPINESS

# HAPPINESS

It was tea time, just before the lights were brought in. The sky was all rosy with sunset and shimmering with gold dust. The villa looked down upon the Mediterranean, which lay without ripple or quiver, like a vast sheet of burnished metal, smooth and shining in the fading daylight. The irregular outline of the distant mountains on the right stood out black against the pale purple background of the western sky.

The conversation turned on love, that old familiar topic, and remarks that had been made many times before were being offered once again. The gentle melancholy of the twilight diffused a languorous charm and created an atmosphere of tender emotion. The word "love," constantly reiterated, now in a man's virile voice, now in a woman's delicate tones, seemed to dominate the little drawing-room, hovering like a bird, brooding like a spirit.

"Is it possible to remain faithful to one love year after year?"

Some said yes, some said no. Distinctions were made, limits defined, and instances cited. The minds of all, men and women alike, were surging with a host of disturbing memories, which trembled on their lips, but which they dared not utter. Their emotion expressed itself in the deep and ardent interest, with which they discussed this commonplace, yet sovereign,

passion, this tender and mysterious bond between two beings.

Suddenly someone, with his eyes on the distant prospect, exclaimed:

"O look over there. What can it be?"

On the sky line, a great blurred mass of grey was rising out of the sea. The ladies sprang to their feet and gazed in surprise at this startling thing that they had never seen before.

"It is Corsica," someone explained. "It is visible two or three times a year in certain exceptional atmospheric conditions. When the air is perfectly clear the mists of water vapour, which usually veil the horizon, are lifted."

The ridges of the mountains could be faintly discerned and some thought that they could make out even the snow on the peaks.

This sudden apparition of a phantom world, emerging from the sea, produced on those who witnessed it a disquieting impression, a feeling of uneasiness, almost of consternation.

An old gentleman, hitherto silent, exclaimed:

"That very island which has risen from the waters as if in response to our conversation, reminds me of a curious experience. It was there that I came upon a wonderful instance of faithful love, a love that was incredibly happy. This is the story:

"Five years ago I paid a visit to Corsica. Although visible now and then, like to-day, from the coast of France, less is known of that wild island than of America, and it seems almost more remote. Picture to yourselves a world still in a state of chaos, a raging sea

of mountains, intersected by narrow gorges with rushing torrents. Instead of plains, there are vast, rolling sweeps of granite and gigantic undulations of the earth, overgrown with bush and great forests of chestnut trees and pines. It is a virgin country, desolate, uncultivated, in spite of an occasional village planted like a heap of rocks on a mountain top. There is no agriculture, industry, or art. You never come upon a scrap of wood carving or sculpture, or any relic, showing in the Corsicans of old a taste, whether primitive or cultured, for graceful and beautiful things. It is this that strikes you most forcibly in that superb but austere country, its hereditary indifference to that striving after exquisite forms, which we call Art. In Italy, every palace is not only full of materpieces, but is itself a masterpiece; in Italy marble, wood, bronze, iron, metals, stone, all testify to the genius of man, and even the humblest relics of antiquity, that lie about in old houses, reveal this divine passion for beauty. Italy is to all of us a beloved and sacred land, because it displays convincingly the energy, grandeur, power and triumph of creative intelligence.

" And opposite her shores, lies wild Corsica, just as she was in her earliest days. There a man leads his own life in his rude cottage, indifferent to everything that does not directly concern himself or his family quarrels. And he still retains the defects and qualities of primitive races. Passionate, vindictive, frankly bloodthirsty, he is at the same time hospitable, generous, faithful, ingenuous. He opens his door to the stranger and repays the most trifling act of kindness with loyal friendship.

" For a whole month I had been wandering all over this magnificent island, and I had a feeling of having reached the end of the world. There were no inns, no taverns, no roads. Mule tracks lead up to hamlets that cling to the mountain sides and look down upon winding cañons, from whose depths rises of an evening the deep, muffled roar of torrents. The wanderer knocks at the door of a house and asks for a night's hospitality. He takes his place at his host's frugal board, sleeps beneath his humble roof, and the next day the master of the house escorts his guest to the outskirts of the village, where they shake hands and part.

" One evening, after a ten hours' tramp, I reached a little solitary dwelling at the upper end of a valley, which, a mile lower, fell away abruptly to the sea. It was a ravine of intense dreariness, walled in by bleak mountains, rising steeply on either side, and covered with bush, fallen rocks, and lofty trees. Near the hut there were some vines and a small garden, and at a little distance, some tall chestnut trees. It was enough to support life, and indeed amounted to a fortune on that poverty-stricken island.

" I was met by an old woman of severe aspect and unusual cleanliness. Her husband rose from a straw-bottomed chair, bowed to me, and then resumed his seat without a word.

" ' Pray excuse him,' said his wife. ' He is deaf. He is eighty-two.'

" To my surprise, she spoke French like a Frenchwoman.

" ' You are not a native of Corsica? ' I asked.

" ' No, we are from the mainland, but we have lived here for fifty years.'

" A wave of horror and dismay swept over me at the thought of those fifty years spent in that gloomy cranny, so far from towns and places where men live. An old shepherd entered, and we all sat down to supper, which consisted of a single course, thick broth containing potatoes, bacon and cabbages all cooked together. When the short meal was over I took a seat before the door. I was weighed down by the melancholy aspect of that forbidding landscape and by that feeling of depression which at times overtakes the traveller on a dismal evening in dreary surroundings, a foreboding that the end of everything, the end of existence, the end of the world, is at hand. Suddenly the appalling wretchedness of life is borne in upon us; the isolation of each one of us; the hollowness of everything; the black loneliness of the heart, which is lulled and deceived by its own imaginings to the brink of the grave.

" Presently the old woman rejoined me, and with the curiosity which lingers even in the serenest soul, she began to question me.

" ' So you come from France? '

" ' Yes, I am on a pleasure trip.'

" ' I suppose you live in Paris.'

" ' No, my home is Nancy.'

" At this she seemed to be seized by some violent emotion, and yet I cannot explain how it was that I saw, or rather felt, her agitation.

" ' Your home is Nancy? ' she repeated slowly.

" Her husband appeared in the doorway, with the impassive air that deaf people have.

" ' Never mind about him," she continued, ' he cannot hear us.' After a pause she resumed:

" ' Then you know people at Nancy? '

" ' Yes, nearly everyone.'

" ' Do you know the Sainte-Allaizes? '

" ' Very well indeed. They were friends of my father's.'

" ' What is your name? '

" I told her. She looked at me searchingly. Then, in the low voice of one conjuring up the past:

" ' Yes, yes, I remember perfectly. And what has become of the Brisemares? '

" ' They are all dead.'

" ' Ah! And did you know the Sirmonts? '

" ' Yes, the last of them is a General now.'

" She was quivering with excitement, with pain, with mingled emotions, strong, sacred, impossible to describe, with a strange yearning to break the silence, to utter all the secrets, hitherto locked away in her heart, to speak about those people, whose very names shook her to the soul.

" ' Henri de Sirmont. Yes, I know,' she exclaimed. ' He is my brother.'

" I glanced at her in amazement. Suddenly I remembered.

" Long ago there had been a terrible scandal among the Lorraine aristocracy. Suzanne de Sirmont, a beautiful and wealthy girl, had eloped with a non-commissioned officer in the Hussar regiment commanded by her father. The son of a peasant, but for all that a fine figure in his blue pelisse, this common soldier had captivated his Colonel's daughter. No doubt she had

had opportunities of seeing him, admiring him, and falling in love with him, as she watched the squadrons trooping past. But how had she contrived to speak to him? How had they managed to meet and come to an understanding? How had she ventured to convey to him that she loved him? No one ever knew.

" No suspicion had been aroused. At the end of the soldier's term of service they disappeared together one night. A search was made for them, but without result. Nothing was ever heard of them again and the family looked upon her as dead.

" And now I had found her in this desolate valley.

" ' I remember perfectly,' I said at last. ' You are Mademoiselle Suzanne.'

" She nodded. Tears welled from her eyes. Then with a glance towards the old man, who was standing motionless on the threshold of his hut,

" ' And that is my husband.'

" Then I realised that she still loved him, that she still beheld him with eyes that had not lost their illusion.

" ' I trust that you have been happy? ' I ventured.

" In a voice straight from the heart she answered:

" ' Yes, very happy. He has made me very happy. I have never regretted anything.'

" I gazed at her in sympathetic surprise, marvelling at the power of love. This well-bred, wealthy girl had followed that humble peasant, and had stooped to his level. She had submitted to an existence destitute of all the graces, luxuries, and refinements of life. She had conformed to his simple ways. And she still loved him. She had become a peasant woman, in bonnet and cotton gown. She sat on a straw-bottomed chair at a

wooden table, and supped on a broth of cabbages, potatoes and bacon, served in an earthenware dish. At night she lay on a palliasse by his side. She had never had a thought for anything but her lover. And she regretted nothing, neither jewels, silks and satins, luxuries, cushioned chairs, the warmth and perfume of tapestried rooms, nor downy couches so grateful to weary limbs. He was her one desire. As long as he was there she asked no more of life.

" A mere girl, she had sacrificed her whole future, the world, and those who had brought her up and loved her. All alone with him, she had come to this wild ravine. And he had been all in all to her. He had satisfied her heart's desires, its dreams, its endless longings, its undying hopes. He had filled her whole life with bliss from beginning to end. She could not possibly have been happier.

" I lay awake all night, listening to the old soldier's stertorous breathing, as he slept on his pallet by the side of her who had followed him to the ends of the earth, and I pondered on their strange, yet simple story; their happiness, so perfect, yet founded on so little.

" At sunrise I shook hands with the old couple and bade them farewell."

. . . . . .

The speaker was silent.

" You may say what you please," one of the women exclaimed, " her ideals were paltry. Her wants and desires were absurdly primitive. She was just a fool."

" What did that matter? " replied another woman pensively. " She was happy."

On the horizon, Corsica was vanishing in the gloom of night, sinking slowly back into the sea, as if its vast shadowy form had manifested itself for no other purpose, than to tell its tale of those two simple lovers, who had found a refuge on its shores.

# VENDETTA

# VENDETTA

PAOLO Saverini's widow dwelt alone with her son in a small, mean house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. Built on a spur of the mountain and in places actually overhanging the sea, the town looks across the rock-strewn Straits to the low-lying coast of Sardinia. On the other side, girdling it almost completely, there is a fissure in the cliff, like an immense corridor, which serves as a port, and down this long channel, as far as the first houses, sail the small Italian and Sardinian fishing boats, and once a fortnight the broken-winded old steamer from Ajaccio. Clustered together on the white hillside, the houses form a patch of even more dazzling whiteness. Clinging to the rock, gazing down upon those deadly Straits where scarcely a ship ventures, they look like the nests of birds of prey. The sea and the barren coast, stripped of all but a scanty covering of grass, are forever harassed by a restless wind, which sweeps along the narrow funnel, ravaging the banks on either side. In all directions the black points of innumerable rocks jut out from the water, with trails of white foam streaming from them, like torn shreds of cloth, floating and quivering on the surface of the waves.

The widow Saverini's house was planted on the very edge of the cliff, and its three windows opened upon this wild and dreary prospect. She lived there with her

son Antoine and their dog Sémillante, a great gaunt brute of the sheep dog variety, with a long, rough coat, whom the young man took with him when he went out shooting.

One evening, Antoine Saverini was treacherously stabbed in a quarrel by Nicolas Ravolati, who escaped that same night to Sardinia.

At the sight of the body, which was brought home by passers-by, the old mother shed no tears, but she gazed long and silently at her dead son. Then laying her wrinkled hand upon the corpse, she promised him the Vendetta. She would not allow anyone to remain with her, and shut herself up with the dead body. The dog Sémillante, who remained with her, stood at the foot of the bed and howled, with her head turned towards her master and her tail between her legs. Neither of them stirred, neither the dog nor the old mother, who was now leaning over the body, gazing at it fixedly, and silently shedding great tears. Still wearing his rough jacket, which was pierced and torn at the breast, the boy lay on his back as if asleep, but there was blood all about him, on his shirt, which had been stripped off in order to expose the wound, on his waistcoat, trousers, face and hands. His beard and hair were matted with clots of blood.

The old mother began to talk to him, and at the sound of her voice the dog stopped howling.

" Never fear, never fear, you shall be avenged, my son, my little son, my poor child. You may sleep in peace. You shall be avenged, I tell you. You have your mother's word, and you know she never breaks it."

Slowly she bent down and pressed her cold lips to the dead lips of her son.

Sémillante resumed her howling, uttering a monotonous, long-drawn wail, heart-rending and terrible. And thus the two remained, the woman and the dog, till morning.

The next day Antoine Saverini was buried, and soon his name ceased to be mentioned in Bonifacio.

. . . . . .

He had no brother, nor any near male relation. There was no man in the family who could take up the Vendetta. Only his mother, his old mother, brooded over it.

From morning till night she could see, just across the Straits, a white speck upon the coast. This was the little Sardinian village of Longosardo, where the Corsican bandits took refuge whenever the hunt for them grew too hot. They formed almost the entire population of the hamlet. In full view of their native shores they waited for a chance to return home and regain the bush. She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had sought shelter in that village.

All day long she sat alone at her window gazing at the opposite coast and thinking of her revenge, but what was she to do with no one to help her, and she herself so feeble and near her end? But she had promised; she had sworn by the dead body of her son; she could not forget, and she dared not delay. What was she to do? She could not sleep at night, she knew not a moment of rest or peace, but racked her brains unceasingly. Sémillante, asleep at her feet, would now and then raise her head and emit a piercing howl. Since

her master had disappeared, this had become a habit; it was as if she were calling him, as if she, too, were inconsolable and preserved in her canine soul an ineffaceable memory of the dead.

One night, when Sémillante began to whine, the old mother had an inspiration of savage, vindictive ferocity. She thought about it till morning. At daybreak she rose and betook herself to church. Prostrate on the stone floor, humbling herself before God, she besought Him to aid and support her, to lend to her poor, worn-out body the strength she needed to avenge her son.

Then she returned home. In the yard stood an old barrel with one end knocked in, which caught the rain-water from the eaves. She turned it over, emptied it, and fixed it to the ground with stakes and stones. Then she chained up Sémillante to this kennel and went into the house.

With her eyes fixed on the Sardinian coast, she walked restlessly up and down her room. He was over there, the murderer.

Th dog howled all day and all night. The next morning the old woman brought her a bowl of water, but no food, neither soup nor bread. Another day passed. Sémillante was worn out and slept. The next morning her eyes were gleaming, and her coat staring, and she tugged frantically at her chain. And again the old woman gave her nothing to eat. Maddened with hunger Sémillante barked hoarsely. Another night went by.

At daybreak, the widow went to a neighbour and begged for two trusses of straw. She took some old clothes that had belonged to her husband, stuffed them

with straw to represent a human figure, and made a head out of a bundle of old rags. Then, in front of Sémillante's kennel, she fixed a stake in the ground and fastened the dummy to it in an upright position.

The dog looked at the straw figure in surprise and, although she was famished, stopped howling.

The old woman went to the pork butcher and bought a long piece of black pudding. When she came home she lighted a wood fire in the yard, close to the kennel, and fried the black pudding. Sémillante bounded up and down in a frenzy, foaming at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the gridiron with its maddening smell of meat.

Her mistress took the steaming pudding and wound it like a tie round the dummy's neck. She fastened it on tightly with string as if to force it inwards. When she had finished, she unchained the dog.

With one ferocious leap, Sémillante flew at the dummy's throat and with her paws on its shoulders, began to tear it. She fell back with a portion of her prey between her jaws, sprang at it again, slashing at the string with her fangs, tore away some scraps of food, dropped for a moment, and hurled herself at it in renewed fury. She tore away the whole face with savage rendings and reduced the neck to shreds.

Motionless and silent, with burning eyes, the old woman looked on. Presently she chained the dog up again. She starved her another two days, and then put her through the same strange performance. For three months she accustomed her to this method of attack, and to tear her meals away with her fangs. She was no longer kept on the chain. At a sign from her mistress. the dog would fly at the dummy's throat.

She learned to tear it to pieces even when no food was concealed about its throat. Afterwards as a reward she was always given the black pudding her mistress had cooked for her.

As soon as she caught sight of the dummy, Sémillante quivered with excitement and looked at her mistress, who would raise her finger and cry in a shrill voice, " Tear him."

. . . . . .

One Sunday morning when she thought the time had come, the widow Saverini went to Confession and Communion, in an ecstasy of devotion. Then she disguised herself like a tattered old beggar man, and struck a bargain with a Sardinian fisherman, who took her and her dog across to the opposite shore.

She carried a large piece of black pudding wrapped in a cloth bag. Sémillante had been starved for two days and her mistress kept exciting her by letting her smell the savoury food.

The pair entered the village of Longosardo. The old woman hobbled along to a baker and asked for the house of Nicolas Ravolati. He had resumed his former occupation, which was that of a joiner, and he was working alone in the back of his shop.

The old woman threw open the door and called :

" Nicolas ! Nicolas ! "

He turned round. Slipping the dog's lead, she cried :

" Tear him ! Tear him ! "

The maddened dog flew at his throat. The man flung out his arms, grappled with the brute and they

rolled on the ground together. For some moments he struggled, kicking the floor with his feet. Then he lay still, while Sémillante tore his throat to shreds.

Two neighbours, seated at their doors, remembered to have seen an old beggar man emerge from the house and, at his heels, a lean black dog, which was eating as it went along, some brown substance that its master was giving it.

By the evening the old woman had reached home again.

That night she slept well.

# THE MINUET

*To Paul Bourget.*

# THE MINUET

" Great calamities make but a slight impression upon me," remarked Jean Bridelle, an old bachelor, who posed as a cynic. " I have seen war at close quarters. I have stepped callously over the bodies of the dead. The brutal violence of nature and man may wrest from us cries of horror or indignation, but they do not afflict us with the heart pangs, the penetrating shudders, provoked by incidents, which harrow us in spite of their seeming insignficance.

" The grief that transcends all other griefs is undoubtedly that of a mother who has lost her child, or a man who has lost his mother. It is terrible in its violence, overwhelming, heartrending. Yet from these afflictions one recovers as from deep wounds that bleed freely. But there are certain chance encounters, incidents half-revealed, half-divined, secret sorrows, ironies of fate, which awaken within us a whole world of painful thoughts. They set ajar, as in a flash, the mysterious portals of moral sufferings, complex, incurable, all the deeper because they seem salutary, all the more excruciating for their apparent intangibility, all the more obstinate because they seem unreal. They leave in our souls a lingering sadness, a tinge of bitterness, a sense of disenchantment that haunts us with strange persistency.

" My mind is obsessed by two or three such incidents,

which another man would never have noticed, yet they have pierced me with wounds that show little on the surface but are none the less deep-seated and incurable. I can hardly expect you to understand the emotion which these swift impressions have left in my soul. I will relate a single instance only. It happened long ago, but it remains as vivid as if it were of yesterday. Possibly my excessive sensibility had its origin in nothing more real than my own fancy.

"I am now fifty. In those days I was a young law student. Of somewhat dreamy and sombre temperament, philosophical but melancholy, I had little love for noisy cafés, rowdy companions and vapid young women. I was an early riser and one of my greatest pleasures was a solitary walk about eight in the morning in the formal garden of the Luxembourg.

"I suppose you fellows never knew that spot. It was like a forgotten garden of a century ago and had all the charm of an old lady's smile. Straight, narrow walks lay between thick hedges, quiet paths between walls of green, screens of foliage kept carefully clipped and trimmed by the gardener's shears. Here and there were flowerbeds, and borders of small trees, arranged two and two like a school out for a walk, clumps of splendid roses and orderly battalions of fruit trees.

"One corner of this enchanting pleasance was devoted entirely to bees. Their straw hives were placed at proper intervals on wooden planks. The hive doors, no bigger than a thimble, opened towards the sun, and all the alleys were humming and buzzing with winged specks of gold, the real queens of this peaceful retreat, the fitting denizens of these tranquil ways.

"I used to go there nearly every morning and to sit on a bench and read. At times my book would fall on my lap, while I listened dreamily to the drone of the city and enjoyed the infinite calm of these old world bowers.

"I soon found that I was not the only person who came to this place as soon as the gates were opened; for sometimes, rounding a clump of trees, I came face to face with a quaint little old gentleman. He wore shoes with silver buckles, knee breeches, a snuff-coloured frock coat, a lace cravat and a fantastic wide-brimmed gray beaver, which might have come out of the Ark. He was extremely thin and angular, and was always simpering and smiling to himself. He had bright eyes with lids that never ceased quivering and blinking, and he carried a magnificent walking-stick with a gold knob, evidently a relic of bygone glory.

"My first impression of surprise was succeeded by a feeling of deep interest. I watched him through the leafy walls, and I followed him at a distance, stopping at the angles of the hedges to avoid being seen.

"One morning, imagining that he was alone, he began to posture in a singular manner. He gave two or three little springs and then made a deep bow. With his spindle legs, he cut a very creditable pigeon's wing, and proceeded in the most debonair fashion to pirouette and skip, gambolling in the drollest way, smiling as if to an audience, gesturing gracefully with his arms curved, contorting his poor stiff joints, and bestowing upon empty space airy salutations at once pathetic and absurd. He was dancing.

" I stood spellbound with amazement, wondering which of us was mad, he or I.

" Suddenly he stopped, came forward like an actor on the boards, bowed and retired, smiling graciously and throwing with his trembling hand stage kisses to the two rows of well-clipped trees. Then he gravely resumed his walk.

" From that day I never let him out of my sight. Every morning he went through his fantastic performance. I was dying to speak to him. At last one day I plucked up my courage and said with a bow:

" ' A fine morning, sir.'

" ' Yes, sir," said he, returning my salute, ' quite like old times.'

" By the end of a week we were fast friends and I had learnt his story. He had been ballet master at the opera in the time of Louis XV. His fine walking-stick was a gift from the Count de Clermont. If one got on to the subject of dancing he would go on prattling for ever.

" One day he made me a confidence.

" ' I married Castris, sir. If you like I will present you to her, but she does not come here till later in the day. This garden, you must know, is our one pleasure; indeed, it is life itself. This alone remains to us of bygone days. We feel that we could not live without it. It is old and distinguished, is it not? Here I seem to breathe the same air as in my youth. My wife and I spend our afternoons here, but I come every morning, too, for I am an early riser.'

" Immediately after luncheon I returned to the Luxembourg. I soon caught sight of my friend, who

was ceremoniously giving his arm to a little old lady in black, to whom I was presented. This was Castris, the famous dancer, beloved by kings and princes, and by all that gallant age, which has bequeathed to the world a fragrance of love.

" We sat down on a bench. It was the month of May. The scent of flowers hovered over the prim paths. The warm sunlight filtered through the leaves and cast upon us broad splashes of light. Castris's black dress was bathed in brightness.

" The garden was deserted. There was a distant rumbling of cab wheels. I turned to the old ballet-master.

" ' I wish you would describe the minuet to me.'

He started.

" ' The minuet, sir, is the queen of dances. Now that there are no more kings, the minuet is no more.'

" And he embarked upon a long, pompous, dithyrambic eulogy, which I could not follow. I begged him to describe the steps, the figures, the attitudes. His efforts resulted in confusion. Exasperated at his failure, nervous and distressed, he turned suddenly to his venerable companion, who sat there grave and silent.

" ' Elise, will you—it would be very kind—will you let us show this gentleman what the minuet used to be? '

" She cast uneasy glances in all directions. Then she rose without a word and took her place opposite the old man. And then I witnessed a scene that I shall never forget.

" They went through all the figures, smiling at each



GIRLS SRINAG

other with childish affectation, swaying, bowing, skipping. Their movements were like those of two antique dolls, actuated by some old damaged mechanism constructed long since by a clever workman after the fashion of his time. As I watched them, my heart was stirred by strange emotions, and my soul moved by an indescribable melancholy. I seemed to see a vision, mournful yet ludicrous, the ghost of an age, whose fashions had vanished. I was divided between laughter and tears.

" Suddenly they halted; the dance was over. For a few moments they stood opposite each other, their faces strangely contorted. Then in a passion of sobbing they fell into each other's arms.

" Three days afterwards I went into the country and I never saw them again. When I returned to Paris two years later, the pleasance had been destroyed. What became of the pair without their beloved, old-world garden, with its mazes, its fragrance of the past, its exquisite, winding paths between the hedges? Are they dead? Do they roam our modern streets like exiles without hope? Or do they, quaint phantoms, dance a spectral minuet in the moonlight among the cypress trees that bound the long pathways of a graveyard? Their memory haunts me; it is an obsession, a torment. It abides with me like an open wound, I know not why.

" No doubt it all seems to you absurd? "

# FEAR

*To J. K. Huysmans.*

GOVT GIRLS COLLEGE
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# FEAR

AFTER dinner we gathered on deck. The Mediterranean lay without a ripple, its surface shot with the silver radiance of the full moon. The great ship glided along, sending up to the star-strewn sky a snaky column of black smoke. In our wake foamed and whirled a white streak of water, ploughed up by the swift passage of the vessel, churned by the screw, and emitting such brilliant flashes of brightness that it seemed like liquid moonlight, all bubbling and boiling.

Six or seven of us stood there in silent admiration, our eyes turned towards the distant shores of Africa, whither we were bound. The Captain, who had joined us and was smoking a cigar, resumed a conversation begun at the dinner table.

" Yes, I knew what fear was that day. My ship lay for six hours spiked on a rock with the seas breaking over her. Luckily towards evening we were sighted and picked up by an English collier."

A man, who had not yet spoken, now broke silence. He was tall, of tanned complexion and grave aspect, the type of man whom one instinctively assumes to have travelled through vast tracts of unexplored countries amid ever-threatening dangers; whose steady eyes retain in their depths something of the strange lands

through which he has wandered, and who is courageous through and through.

" You say, Captain, that you knew what fear was. I don't believe it. You are mistaken both as to the term you used and the sensation you experienced. A brave man has never any fear in the presence of imminent danger. He may be excited, agitated and anxious, but as for fear, that is quite another thing."

The Captain laughed.

" Stuff and nonsense! I tell you I was in a blue funk."

The bronze-faced man replied in deliberate tones:

" Allow me to explain. Fear,—and the bravest of men can experience fear,—is a dreadful thing; it is an appalling sensation, as if one's soul were disintegrating; it is a torturing pang, convulsing mind and heart; a horror, of which the mere remembrance evokes a shudder of anguish. But a brave man is not subject to it at the prospect of a hostile attack, or confronted with certain death, or any familiar form of danger. It comes upon him in certain abnormal conditions, when certain mysterious influences are at work, in the face of perils which he does not understand. True fear has in it something of the memory of fantastic terrors of long ago. Now a man who believes in ghosts, and thinks he sees a spectre in the night, is bound to experience fear in all its devastating horror.

" About ten years ago I myself had this feeling in broad daylight, and last winter it came upon me again, one December night. Yet I have often run risks and had death hanging over me, and I have seen a lot of fighting. I have been left for dead by brigands. I

have been sentenced to be hanged as a rebel in America, and flung into the sea from the deck of a ship off the coast of China. Each time I gave myself up for lost, and accepted the situation without emotion, even without regret.

" But fear is a very different thing. I felt a first hint of it in Africa. And yet the North is its real home; the sun disperses it like a fog. This is an interesting point. With Orientals, life is of no account; they are fatalists, one and all. The clear Eastern nights foster none of those sinister forebodings which haunt the minds of those who dwell in cold countries. In the East there is such a thing as panic, but fear is unknown.

" Well, this is what happened to me over there in Africa. I was crossing the vast sandhills south of Ouargla, one of the strangest tracts of country in the world. You all know what the smooth level sands of a sea beach are like, running on and on interminably. Now picture in your minds the ocean itself turned to sand in the middle of a hurricane. Imagine a tempest without sound and with billows of yellow sand that never move. To the height of mountains they rise, these irregular waves of all shapes and sizes, surging like the ungovernable waters of ocean, but vaster and streaked like watered silk. And the pitiless rays of the devastating southern sun beat straight down upon that raging sea, lying there without sound or motion. A journey across these steeps of golden dust is one continual ascent and descent, without a moment of respite, or a vestige of shade. The horses pant and sink in up to their knees, and flounder down the slopes of these extraordinary hills.

" Our party consisted of my friend and myself, with an escort of eight spahis, four camels and their drivers. Overcome with heat and fatigue, parched with thirst as the burning desert itself, we rode in silence. Suddenly one of our men uttered a cry; everyone halted; and we remained rooted to the spot, surprised by a phenomenon, which, though familiar to travellers in those God-forsaken parts, has never been explained. From somewhere near at hand, but in a direction difficult to determine, came the roll of a drum, the mysterious drum of the sandhills. Its beating was distinct, now loud, now soft, now dying away, now resuming its weird tattoo.

" The Arabs looked at one another in horror, and one of them said in his own tongue:

" ' Death is upon us.'

" And as he spoke, my comrade, my friend, who was almost like a brother to me, fell headlong from his horse, struck down by sunstroke.

" For two hours, while I laboured in vain to save his life, that phantom drum filled my ears with its monotonous, intermittent and baffling throbbing. And I felt fear, real fear, ghastly fear, glide into my bones, as I gazed at the body of the man I loved, there in that sun-baked hollow, between four sandhills, six hundred miles from the nearest French settlement, with that rapid, mysterious drumming echoing in our ears.

" That day I knew what fear was. I realised it even more profoundly on another occasion."

The Captain interrupted him:

" Excuse me, sir, but what was that drum? "

" I don't know," the traveller replied, " Nobody

knows. Military officers, who have often been startled at this singular sound, are generally of opinion that it is caused by sand scudding before the wind and brushing against tufts of dry grass, the echo being intensified and multiplied to prodigious volume by the valley formation of that desert region. It has been observed that the phenomenon always occurs near small plants burnt up by the sun and as hard as parchment. According to this theory, the drum was simply a sort of sound mirage, nothing more. But I did not learn this till later.

" I come to my second experience.

" It was last winter in a forest in the North East of France. The sky was so overcast that night fell two hours before its time. My guide was a peasant, who walked beside me along a narrow path beneath overarching fir trees, through which the wind howled. Through the tree-tops I saw the clouds scurrying past in wild confusion, as if fleeing in dismay and terror. Now and then, struck by a furious blast, the whole forest groaned as if in pain and swayed in one direction. In spite of my rapid pace and my thick clothes, I was perishing with cold. We were to sup and sleep at the house of a forest-guard, who lived not far away. I had come for some shooting.

" Now and then my guide looked up and muttered:

" ' Miserable weather ! '

" Then he talked about the people to whose house we were going. The master of the house had killed a poacher two years before, and ever since he had seemed depressed as if haunted by the memory. His two married sons lived with him. The darkness was intense. I could see nothing before me or around me, and the

boughs of the trees, clashing together, filled the night with a ceaseless uproar. At last I saw a light and my companion was soon knocking at a door. Shrill cries of women answered us. Then a man, speaking in a strangled voice, asked:

" ' Who goes there? '

" My guide gave his name and we entered. It was a scene I shall never forget. A white-haired old man with wild eyes, stood waiting for us in the middle of the kitchen with a loaded gun in his hand, while two stout lads, armed with axes, guarded the door. I could make out two women kneeling in the dark corners of the room with their faces hidden against the wall.

" We explained our business. The old man replaced his weapon against the wall, and ordered my room to be made ready. As the women did not stir, he said to me abruptly:

" ' You see, sir, two years ago to-night I killed a man. Last year he appeared and called me. I expect him again this evening.'

" And he added in a tone which made me smile:

" ' So we are rather uneasy.'

" I did what I could to soothe him and felt glad that I had come that evening, just in the nick of time to witness this exhibition of superstitious terror. I told stories and almost succeeded in calming down the whole family.

" By the fire lay an old dog, asleep with his head on his paws. He was nearly blind, and with his moustached muzzle he was the sort of dog who reminds one of some acquaintance.

" Outside the tempest beat fiercely on the little house,

and through a small square opening, a sort of peep-hole near the door, I suddenly saw, by the glare of vivid lightning, a confused mass of trees, tossed about by the wind.

" I realised that, in spite of my efforts, these people were under the sway of some deep-seated terror. When ever I stopped talking, every ear was straining into the distance. Tired of the spectacle of these foolish fears, I was about to retire to bed when the old forest-guard suddenly jumped up from his chair, seized his gun again and gasped in frenzied tones :

" ' There he is. There he is. I can hear him.'

" The two women fell on their knees again and hid their faces; the sons picked up their axes. I was preparing to make another attempt to calm them when the sleeping dog suddenly raised his head and stretched his neck and, looking into the fire with his dim eyes, uttered one of those melancholy howls which startle the benighted traveller. All eyes turned towards him. He stood there perfctly rigid, as if he had seen a ghost. And again he howled at something invisible, something unknown, and, to judge from his bristling coat, something that frightened him.

" Livid with terror, the forest-guard cried out :

" ' He scents him. He scents him. He was with me when I killed him.'

" The two distracted women began to mingle their howls with those of the dog. In spite of myself, a cold shudder ran down my spine. The dog's clairvoyance, in that place, at that hour of the night, in the midst of those terror-stricken people, was an uncanny thing to see.

" For a whole hour that dog went on howling without stirring from the spot. He howled as if in the agony of a nightmare, and fear, appalling fear, came upon me. Fear of what? I have no idea. All I can say is that it was fear.

" We remained there pale and motionless, awaiting some dreadful sequel, with ears intent and beating hearts, convulsed by the slightest sound. Then the dog began to roam about the room, sniffing the walls, and whining incessantly. The brute was driving us mad. At last the peasant, my guide, seized him in a sort of paroxysm of angry terror and, throwing open a door, flung him out into a small courtyard.

" Immediately the dog was still, and we remained plunged in a silence, which was even more nerve-racking. Suddenly we all gave a simultaneous bound. Something was gliding along the outer wall on the side nearest the forest. It brushed against the door and seemed to fumble there with hesitating touch. Then followed two minutes of a silence that maddened us. Then the thing returned, brushing against the wall as before, and scratching on it lightly, like a child scratching with its fingernail. Suddenly a head appeared at the peephole, a white face with gleaming eyes, like those of a wild beast. And from its mouth came a vague sound like a plaintive moan.

" There was a noise of a tremendous explosion in the kitchen. The old forest-guard had fired his gun. At the same time the two sons rushed to block up the peephole with the big table, which they reinforced with the dresser.

" And I solemnly assure you that at that unexpected

report of the gun, such an agonising pang shot through me, heart and soul and body, that I was ready to faint, ready to die of fear.

" We stayed there till dawn, unable to stir or utter a word, in the grip of a horror I cannot describe.

" No one ventured to move the barricade till we saw, through a chink in the pent-roof, a slender ray of daylight.

" At the foot of the wall, close against the door, lay the old dog with a bullet in his throat. He had got out of the courtyard by digging a hole under the fence."

The man with the bronzed face ceased speaking. Then he added:

" That night I was in no danger whatever. But I would rather go through again all the worst perils I have encountered than that single moment when the gun was fired at that hairy face at the window."

# THE CHAIRMENDER

*To Léon Hennique.*

# THE CHAIRMENDER

It was towards the end of a dinner-party, given by the Marquis de Bertran to celebrate the opening of the shooting season. Eleven sportsmen, eight young women and the local doctor were seated around the brilliantly lighted table, which was decked with fruit and flowers.

The conversation turned on love, and a heated discussion arose on the eternal question whether one could truly love many times or once only. Instances were given of some who had never seriously loved but once, and instances of others who had loved often and vehemently. On the whole, the men affirmed that this passion could, like a disease, attack the same person again and again, and even prove fatal, if hindered in its course. Although this view could not be disproved, the ladies, who based their opinion on poetic fancies rather than observation, held that love, true love, heroic love, could visit a human being once only; that such love as this was like a thunderbolt, and that a heart that had once experienced it was ever afterwards so utterly devastated, ravaged and consumed, that no other strong passion, or even passing fancy, could strike root there again. The Marquis, a man of many love affairs, warmly contested this theory.

"I assure you that one can love time after time with

all one's strength, with all one's soul. You quote instances of people who have killed themselves for love, as a proof of the impossibility of a second passion. But my answer to that is, that if they had not been so foolish as to kill themselves, a step which deprived them of all possibility of another attack, they would have recovered from the first seizure, and they would have begun again, and yet again, to the end of their days. Lovers are like drunkards. A man who has drunk will drink again, and a man who has loved will love again. It is entirely a question of temperament."

They referred the dispute to the doctor, who had retired to the country after practising in Paris. They begged him to give his opinion. He had, however, no settled convictions:

"As the Marquis says, it is a question of temperament. But I do know one case of a passion which endured for fifty-five years, without a day's intermission, and ended only with death."

The Marchioness clapped her hands.

"How beautiful! What a perfect dream to be loved like that! What bliss to live, for fifty-five years, the object of such frantic and absorbing affection! How happy, how exquisitely content with life this man must have been, who inspired such adoration!"

The doctor smiled:

"You are right on one point, Madam. As you have guessed, the object of this devotion was a man. You know him; it was Monsieur Chouquet, the local chemist. And you knew the woman, too, the old chairmender who used to come every year to the manor house. But I will tell you the story in detail."

The ladies' enthusiasm suffered a sudden collapse. They had a look of disgust on their faces, as if they felt that love should confine itself to persons of refinement and distinction, for in them only could people of quality take a real interest.

"Three months ago," resumed the doctor, "I was summoned to that old woman's death-bed. She had arrived here the day before in the van, which served her for home and which was drawn by the old screw you have all seen. Her two big black dogs, her friends and protectors, were with her. The priest was already by her side. She appointed us executors of her will and in order to make her last wishes clear to us she told us the whole story of her life. I have never heard anything more singular or more poignant.

"Her father and mother were chairmenders and she had never lived in a proper house. As a little thing she roamed about, ragged, dirty and squalid. The family used to halt on the outskirts of villages by the roadside, take the horse out of the van aud turn it loose to graze. The dog would curl up and go to sleep, his head on his paws, and the child would tumble about on the grass, while her parents, seated in the shadow of the wayside elms, patched up all the old chairs in the parish. Few words were wasted in that abode on wheels. After a brief discussion as to who should make the round of the houses, uttering the familiar cry: "Chairs to mend," they set to work to plait the straw, seated opposite each other, or side by side. If the child wandered too far or tried to make friends with some village urchin, her father's angry voice recalled her:

"'Come here at once, you little blackguard!'

" These were the only words of affection she ever heard. As she grew bigger she was sent round to collect chairs that required mending. Presently, in her wanderings, she began to scrape acquaintance with other youngsters. But now it was the parents of her new friends who roughly called their children away :

" ' Come here at once, you young scamp. Don't let me catch you talking to vagabonds.'

" Small boys would often throw throw stones at her. Ladies sometimes gave her coppers which she hoarded carefully.

" One day, when she was eleven years old, the family came to this neighbourhood. At the back of the cemetery she saw young Chouquet, crying because a playfellow had robbed him of a couple of farthings. The little outcast was greatly perturbed by the tears of this small townsman. Her childish mind had supposed that children of his class were always happy and content. She went up to him, and on learning the cause of his trouble, she poured into his hands all her savings, seven sous, which he took as a matter of course, wiping away his tears. Such was her ecstasy of joy, that she actually ventured to kiss him. As he was absorbed in the contemplation of the coins, he made no objection. Seeing that he did not shake her off or strike her, she threw her arms round him and kissed him passionately. Then she ran away.

" What was the idea in that poor little head? What was the bond that linked her to that other child? Was it because she had sacrificed to him her whole pitiful little fortune, or because she had given him her first

kiss of love? The mystery is one and the same, for children as for grown-ups.

"For months she dreamed of that corner of the cemetery and of that small boy. In the hope of seeing him again, she robbed her parents, pocketing a sou here and there out of sums given her in payment, or entrusted to her for buying food.

"Next time she came, she had two francs in her pocket. But she merely caught a glimpse of the youngster, looking very spick and span, as she glanced through the windows of his father's drug shop, peering between a big red bottle and a tapeworm in spirits. Dazzled and entranced by the resplendent glory of the coloured water, by the glamour of the glittering phials, she loved him all the more. The memory of him never faded from her mind. Next year when she came upon him behind the school, playing marbles with his comrades, she flung herself upon him, clasped him in her arms, and kissed him with such violence that he began to scream with terror. To soothe him, she gave him all the money she had, a veritable fortune, three francs and four sous, at which he stared with wide open eyes. He accepted the money and allowed her to kiss him as much as she pleased.

"For the next four years she poured into his hands all her savings, which he pocketed, conceding kisses as a fair exchange. Once it was thirty sous, once two francs, another time twelve sous—and over this she shed tears of pain and humiliation, but it had been a bad year—finally five francs, a large round coin, which made him laugh for joy.

"He occupied all her thoughts, and he himself

awaited her return with a certain impatience, and would come running to her, as soon as he saw her, in a way that made her heart leap with happiness.

" Then he disappeared. He had been sent to school, as she ascertained by skilful questioning. With infinite adroitness, she tried to induce her parents to change the order of their rounds, so that their visits should coincide with the vacations. At last she was successful, but it had cost her a whole year's scheming. Thus two years had elapsed without her seeing him, and she hardly recognised him, he had changed so much. He had grown and had improved in looks, and he was very impressive in a jacket with gold buttons. He pretended not to see her and passed by with his head in the air. She cried for two days and this was the beginning of sufferings that never ended.

" Every year she came back. She passed him in the street without daring to greet him, while he did not deign even to glance at her. She loved him to distraction.

" ' Doctor,' she said to me, ' he is the only man I have ever had eyes for in the whole world. I hardly know if the others even exist.'

" After her parents' death she carried on their trade, but she now kept two dogs, instead of one, ferocious brutes whom no one would have dared to tackle. One day when she returned to the little town where she had left her heart she saw a young woman coming out of the chemist's shop, leaning on Chouquet's arm. It was his wife. He was married.

" That evening she threw herself into the pond near the Town Hall. A belated reveller fished her out and

carried her to the chemist's. Young Chouquet came down in his dressing-gown to attend to her and, without giving any sign of recognition, took off her clothes, and rubbed her, and said severely :

" ' You must have been mad. What a silly thing to do ! '

" That was enough to restore her. He had spoken to her; it kept her happy for a long time. He declined to accept any remuneration for his services, though she vehemently pressed payment upon him.

" And thus her whole life slipped away. She sat at her chairmending thinking all the while of Chouquet. Every year she saw him through the windows of his shop. She took to buying from him a stock of simple remedies. In this way, she saw him close to, spoke to him, and gave him money as in the old days.

" As I told you before, she died this spring. After relating this pathetic story, she begged me to make over to the man whom she had so faithfully loved, her whole savings of a lifetime. She had worked only for him, she said, even going hungry to add to her hoard, so as to make sure that he would think of her at least once more when she was dead. She then gave me two thousand three hundred and twenty-seven francs. The odd twenty-seven francs I left with the priest for funeral expenses, the rest I took away with me as soon as she had breathed her last.

" Next day I went to see the Chouquets. They were seated opposite each other, finishing their luncheon, a fat, red-faced couple, redolent of the drugs they sold, consequential and pleased with life. They invited me to sit down and offered me a liqueur, which I accepted.

Then in a voice quivering with emotion I began my story, expecting to move them to tears.

" But as soon as he understood that he had been beloved by that strolling vagabond of a chairmender, Chouquet jumped out of his seat with rage. It was as if she had stolen from him his good name, the esteem of respectable folk, his personal honour, some subtle refinement, which he valued more than life itself. Equally disgusted, his wife could find nothing to say but:

" ' That old beggar woman! That old beggar woman! '

" Chouquet was stamping round the table, his skull cap askew over one ear.

" ' Did you ever hear the like, Doctor,' he broke out. ' What a horrible business this is! What on earth am I to do? If I had known this when she was alive I would have had her taken up and sent to jail. And there she should have stayed, I promise you.'

" I was thunderstruck at the result of my well-intended effort, and at a loss as to what to say or do. But I had to fulfil my mission. I resumed:

" ' She bade me make over to you her savings, amounting to two thousand three hundred francs. But as the story I have told you seems to displease you so much, perhaps this money had better be given to the poor.'

" Speechless with surprise, the pair of them stared at me. I took the money from my pockets, a sordid collection of coins of all countries and mintages, gold and copper mixed together, and I asked:

" ' What do you think about it? '

" Madame Chouquet was the first to find words.

" ' Well, since it was the woman's last wish . . . I think we can hardly refuse.'

" Her husband added, rather shamefacedly :

" ' We can always spend it on something for the children.'

" ' Just as you please,' I said drily.

" ' Very well," he replied, ' as she asked you to, you had better hand it over. We shall find an opportunity of spending it on some deserving object.'

" I made over the money, bowed and took my departure.

" Next day Chouquet came to me and said abruptly :

" ' I see . . . that woman has left her van here. What are you going to do with it? '

" ' Nothing. Take it if you like.'

" ' Capital. It's just what I wanted for a shed for my kitchen garden.'

" As he was going away, I called him back.

" ' She has also left her old horse and her two dogs. Do you want them, too? '

" He stood still in surprise.

" ' Good Lord, no. What earthly use would they be to me? Do what you like with them.'

" He laughed and we shook hands. After all, in a country place, doctor and chemist must remain friends.

" I have kept the dogs. The priest, who has a large courtyard, has the horse. The van is used by Chouquet as a shed and with the money he has bought five shares in a Railway Company.

" That is the only instance of perfect love I have ever known."

The doctor fell silent. The Marchioness, with tears in her eyes, sighed:

" That proves it. It is only women who know how to love."

# THE WILL

*To Paul Hervieu.*

# THE WILL

You remember that tall fellow René de Bourneval? He was a friend of mine and companionable enough, though a trifle gloomy. He was a confirmed and genuine cynic. His irony was as biting as it was accurate, and he had a special gift for exposing in a single phrase the insincerities of convention. One of his favourite maxims was:

"No man is absolutely honest, though he may be relatively so beside a scoundrel."

He had two brothers, called de Courcils, whom he never saw. From the difference of surname, I assumed that they were his half-brothers. I had often heard that there was a strange story in the family, but I knew no details. Bourneval attracted me greatly, and we became fast friends. One evening when I was dining with him I happened to ask:

"Are you the son of your mother's first or second marriage?"

He turned first pale, then red. For some moments he did not answer and was visibly embarrassed. Then, with the sweet and melancholy smile peculiar to him, he replied:

"My dear fellow, if it will not bore you, I will tell you the singular story of my birth. You are, I know, a sensible man and I need not fear that your friend-

ship will be affected by it. If it is, why then I can manage very well without it.

" My mother, Madame de Courcils, was a poor, timid little creature, whom her husband had married for her fortune. Her whole life was a martyrdom. Of an affectionate, gentle and shrinking disposition, she was eternally bullied by the man, who should have been my father. He was one of those boors, who call themselves country gentlemen. A month after their marriage he had an affair with one of the maids. The wives and daughters of his tenants served as his mistresses, but this did not prevent him from having two children by his wife, or, if you count me, three. My mother never said a word. She lived in that noisy household like a little mouse, which scurries away under chairs and tables. Slighted, neglected, trembling, she looked at people with bright, restless, roving eyes, the eyes of a hunted creature in a state of constant terror. Yet she was extremely pretty, a very fair blonde, but of a fairness so neutral and timid that it seemed as if her hair had lost its colour owing to her incessant fears.

" One of Monsieur de Courcils' friends, and a constant visitor, was a retired cavalry officer, a formidable person, at once kind-hearted and headstrong, capable of the most resolute decisions. He was a widower and I bear his name, de Bourneval. He was a tall, thin fellow with a great black moustache. I am very much like him. He was a well-read man, with ideas unusual in his class. J. J. Rousseau had been his great grandmother's lover, and he seemed to have inherited some peculiar strain from that ancestral love affair. He knew by heart the *Contrat Social*, the *Nouvelle Héloïse*

and all those philosophising books, which were in the distant future to bring about the overthrow of our ancient customs and prejudices, our obsolete laws, our idiotic morality.

" It seems that he loved my mother and that his love was returned. The secret of this intrigue was so well kept that no one suspected it. My poor mother, neglected and unhappy, must have clung to him desperately and have caught from their intercourse his ways of thinking, his theories of free choice, his daring views on unfettered love. But she was so timid that she never spoke above a whisper and all these ideas were repressed, concentrated, packed closely in a heart that she never unlocked. My two brothers, like my father, were unkind to her and never petted her. Accustomed to see her a nonentity in the household, they treated her almost like a servant. I was the only one of her sons who loved her truly and was loved by her in return.

" To make the sequel clear I must explain that on my mother's marriage, a settlement had been made in favour of my father, but at the same time a division of estate had been effected. Thanks to the subtleties of the law and her lawyer's intelligent devotion to her interests, she retained the right of bequeathing her property at her own discretion. We were therefore informed that there was a will deposited with her lawyer, and we were invited to hear it read.

" I remember it all as if it had happened yesterday. The scene was melodramatic, farcical, amazing. It was the expression of the dead woman's posthumous revolt, her cry of liberty. From the depths of the tomb, this martyr, who had been crushed under our social code,

was issuing a challenge; from her sealed coffin she was sending up a desperate claim to independence. My supposed father, a burly, full-blooded man, reminding one of a butcher, and my two brothers, sturdy youngsters of twenty and twenty-two, waited quietly on their chairs. Monsieur de Bourneval, who had been invited to be present, entered and took his place behind me. He wore a close-fitting frock coat. He was very pale and kept biting his moustache, which had by now a hint of gray in it. No doubt he was prepared for what was coming.

"The lawyer double-locked the door and broke the red seals on the envelope, the contents of which were unknown to him, and he began to read."

My friend broke off, rose from his chair and took from his desk an old document, which he unfolded and kissed reverently. Then he resumed:

"Here is my dear mother's will:

"'I, the undersigned Anne Catherine Geneviève Matilda de Croixluce, lawful wife of Jean Leopold Joseph Gontran de Courcils, being sound of mind and body, declare these my last wishes.

"'I ask pardon first of God, next of my dear son René, for what I am about to disclose. I believe my son to be sufficiently magnanimous to understand and to forgive. I have endured a lifetime of suffering. Married from selfish motives, I have been despised, slighted and oppressed by a husband, constantly unfaithful to me. I forgive him, but I owe him nothing.

"'My elder sons have never loved me or been kind to me and have scarcely treated me as a mother. I did my duty by them while I was alive. Dead, I owe them

nothing. Ties of blood are of no account, unless they are strengthened day by day by faithful and devoted affection. An ungrateful son is worse than a stranger; he is a criminal, for he has no right to treat his mother with indifference.

" ' I have always been afraid of men, their iniquitous laws, their inhuman customs, their shameful prejudices. In the presence of God I fear no longer. Dead, I cast away all degrading pretence; I dare to speak my mind, to avow and attest the secret of my heart.

" ' Therefore, I leave in trust all that part of my estate of which the law allows me to dispose, to my true lover, Pierre Germer Simon de Bourneval, with reversion to our dear son René.'

" (This bequest was confirmed with more formality by a deed executed in due form.)

" ' And before the great Judge Who hears me, I declare that I should have cursed Heaven and life itself had I not experienced the deep, devoted, tender and unswerving affection of my lover, had I not learned in his arms that the Creator has made His creatures for mutual love, support, and consolation, and to mingle their tears in hours of sorrow.

" ' My two elder sons have Monsieur de Courcils for father. René alone owes his existence to Monsieur de Bourneval. I pray the Ruler of men and of human fate that both father and son may rise superior to social prejudices and love one another till death, and love me still, in my grave.

" ' Matilda de Croixluce.'

" Monsieur de Courcils started up.

" ' This is the will of a lunatic,' he burst out. Mon-

sieur de Bourneval stepped forward and said in a loud, decisive voice:

"'I, Simon de Bourneval, declare that this document contains nothing but the absolute truth. I am ready to prove it by letters in my possession.'

"Monsieur de Courcils strode up to him. I thought they would come to blows. They stood there, trembling with rage, tall men, both of them, one stout, the other thin. The widower stammered out:

"'You scoundrel.'

"The other replied in the same forcible, dry tones as before:

"'We will meet elsewhere, sir. I should have struck you and provoked a quarrel long since, had I not cared above all for the peace, while she lived, of that unfortunate lady to whom you caused so much suffering.'

"Then he turned to me:

"'You are my son. Will you come with me? I have no right to take you away, but I will assume it if you will accompany me.'

"I made no reply, but pressed his hand. We went out together. At the time I felt almost beside myself.

"Two days later Monsieur de Bourneval killed Monsieur de Courcils in a duel. Anxious to avoid a shocking scandal, my brothers hushed up the matter. I offered them, and they accepted, half the fortune left me by my mother. I took the name of my real father, renouncing the name given me by law, but to which I had no moral right.

"Monsieur de Bourneval died five years ago. I still mourn for him."

He rose and took a few strides, then he stopped in front of me:

"Well, I maintain that my mother's will was one of the finest, most honourable and noble acts a woman could perform. Don't you agree with me?"

"Indeed, I do, my friend," I said, holding out my hands to him.

# IN THE COUNTRY

*To Octave Mirbeau.*

# IN THE COUNTRY

Two thatched cottages stood side by side at the foot of a hill, near a small watering place. They were occupied by two peasants, who toiled hard to wrest from the barren soil a livelihood for their young families. In each household there were four children, ranging in age from six years to about fifteen months. Before the cottage doors all these youngsters swarmed about from morning till evening. Both couples had married, and had had children, at about the same time.

The two mothers could hardly distinguish their offspring when they were all together and the two fathers mixed them up hopelessly. The eight names were forever jumbled in their heads, and when they wanted one of the children, the men often called out two or three names before hitting on the right one.

In the first of the two dwellings, on the way from the little watering place, lived the Tuvaches, who had three boys and a girl; in the other hut the Vallins, who had, at this time, three girls and a boy. Both families lived frugally on soup, potatoes and fresh air. At seven in the morning, at mid-day, and at six in the evening, the mothers gathered their little ones in for their meal, like goose girls herding their flocks. The children sat in order of age, at a wooden table polished by fifty years' use. The youngest baby's mouth was

hardly on a level with the edge of the table. A deep dish full of bread, with which had been boiled potatoes, half a cabbage and two or three onions, was set before them, and the whole crew ate till they were satisfied. The mother fed the smallest child herself. On Sundays, as a great treat, there was a scrap of meat cooked in the broth, and the father used to linger over his meal and say:

"I could do with this every day."

One afternoon in August, a light trap drew up in front of the two cottages. The lady, who was driving, exclaimed to the man at her side:

"O Henry, see that swarm of children. How pretty they look, tumbling about in the dust!"

Her companion made no reply. He was accustomed to these outbursts, which held for him a sting, almost a reproach. The young woman went on:

"I really must kiss them. How I should love to have one of them, that one there, the smallest."

Jumping out of the trap, she ran to the children, caught up the youngest Tuvache, and lifting him in her arms, passionately kissed his dirty cheeks, his fair, curly hair, plastered with mud, his little hands, with which he struggled to free himself from these tiresome caresses. Then she went back to the trap and drove away at a fast trot. Next week she came again, seated herself on the ground, took the baby in her arms, stuffed it with cakes, distributed sweets among the rest, and played with them like a little street girl, while her husband waited patiently in the light trap.

She came again and again, with her pockets full of dainties and coppers, and she made friends with

the parents. Her name was Madame Henry d'Hubières.

One morning her husband got down from the trap and accompanied her. Without lingering with the children, who by this time knew her well, she entered one of the cottages. The Tuvaches were within, chopping wood for the kitchen fire. They started up in surprise, offered the visitors chairs, and waited expectantly. The lady began in a hesitating, faltering voice:

"My good people, I have come to see you, because I should like . . . I should very much like . . . to carry off your little boy."

The peasant and his wife were too utterly dumbfoundered to reply. Madame d'Hubières took breath again and resumed:

"We have no chidren; we are all alone, my husband and I . . . we should like to keep him . . . will you consent?"

The peasant woman began to understand.

"You want to take away our Charlot? Certainly not."

Monsieur d'Hubières broke in:

"My wife has not explained herself clearly. We wish to adopt the child, but he shall come to see you. If he turns out well, as there is every reason to expect, he shall be our heir. If we should have children of our own, he would share equally with them. If he should not do justice to our bringing up, we would give him, when he came of age, twenty thousand francs, to be placed in trust for him. We have thought of you, too, and will pay you an allowance of a hundred francs a

month for the rest of your lives. Now do you understand? "

The woman started up in a fury.

" Do you want us to sell our Charlot? A nice thing to ask of a mother! No, no, it would be a horrible thing thing to do."

Her husband looked serious and thoughtful and said nothing, but he kept nodding his head approvingly at his wife.

Madame d'Hubières was in despair, and began to cry. Turning to her husband, in a voice broken by sobs, the voice of a child used to having its own way in everything, she faltered:

" They won't, Henry, they won't."

They made a final effort:

" But, my friends, think of your child's future, his happiness, his . . ."

In a fury the woman cut short their speech:

" We quite understand and have thought it all out. Be off and don't let me see you here again. The idea of carrying off a child like that! "

As she went out, Madame d'Hubières remembered that there were two tiny boys. With the insistence of a spoilt, self-willed woman, too impatient to wait, she asked through her tears:

" That other little fellow is not yours, is he? "

Tuvache answered:

" No, he belongs next door. You can try there if you like."

And he went back into the house, which still echoed with the angry voice of his wife.

The two Vallins were sitting at the table, slowly

eating scantily buttered slices of bread, with one plate between them. Monsieur d'Hubières again made his proposal, but this time he went warily; he was more persuasive, more guarded in his arguments. At first the peasant and his wife shook their heads in refusal, but when they learnt that they were to have a hundred francs a month, they glanced at each other questioningly, their resolution somewhat shaken.

For a long time, in a torment of indecision, they kept silence. At last the woman asked:

"What do you say to it, husband?"

He replied sententiously:

"I say that it's not to be sneezed at."

Then Madame d'Hubières, who was trembling with suspense, spoke of the child's future, of his happiness, of all the money he would be able to give his parents later on.

The peasant asked:

"That annuity of twelve hundred francs, will it be promised in the presence of a lawyer?"

"Certainly. To - morrow," replied Monsieur d'Hubières.

The wife, who had been thinking the matter over, said:

"One hundred francs a month isn't enough for taking away our child. In a few years he will be able to work. We must have a hundred and twenty."

Madame d'Hubières, who was stamping with impatience, agreed to this at once. And as she wanted to take the child then and there, she made the parents a present of a hundred francs, while her husband put the transaction in writing. The mayor and a neigh-

bour were called in and obligingly witnessed the agreement.

The lady carried off the screaming baby in triumph, as if carrying off from a shop some knick-knack on which she had set her heart. The Tuvaches stood in their doorway, silent and disapproving, and watched the child's departure, perhaps, however, regretting their own refusal.

. . . . . .

Nothing more was heard of little Jean Vallin. His parents went every month to draw their hundred and twenty francs at the lawyer's office. They were on bad terms with their neighbours because Mother Tuvache made their lives a burden to them with her taunts. She went from house to house, saying how unnatural it was to sell one's own child, how horrible, disgusting, and abominable. And now and then she would ostentatiously clasp Charlot in her arms and exclaim, just as if he could understand:

"I didn't sell you, my pet, not I. I didn't sell you. I don't sell my children. I'm not rich, but I don't sell my children."

Day after day, year after year, she stood on her doorstep making these insulting allusions in tones that could not fail to penetrate to the cottage next door. In the end Mother Tuvache came to fancy herself superior to the whole countryside, because she had not sold Charlot. And people said of her:

"I'm sure it must have been very tempting, but for all that she behaved like a good mother."

She was held up as an example, and Charlot, now nearly eighteen, in whom this notion had been inces-

santly inculcated, regarded himself as superior to his companions, because he had not been sold.

Thanks to their annuity, the Vallins rubbed along very comfortably, while the Tuvaches had remained in squalid poverty. Their neighbours' prosperity was the real cause of the Tuvaches' inveterate animosity. The eldest Tuvache boy went away to do his military service. The second son died; Charlot alone remained to help his old father toil to support his mother and two younger sisters. He was getting on for twenty-one, when one morning a smart turnout drew up before the two cottages. A young gentleman, with a gold watch-chain, alighted, and shook hands with a white-haired old lady, who said:

"That's it, my dear, the second house."

And he entered the Vallins' hut as if it were his home. The old mother was washing aprons; the father, a feeble old man, was dozing by the hearth. Both of them looked up. The young man said:

"Good morning, father; good morning, mother."

They started up in amazement. In her agitation, the old woman dropped her soap into the basin and faltered:

"Is that my son, my own son?"

He clasped her in his arms and kissed her, and said again:

"Good morning, mother."

Although he was trembling with emotion, the old man merely remarked in his usual calm tones:

"Well, Jean, here you are again," as if he had seen him not a month before.

As soon as they had recovered from their surprise, the parents insisted on showing him off to all the neigh-

bourhood. They took him to see the mayor, the deputy mayor, the vicar, and the schoolmaster.

Charlot stood on the threshold of the cottage and watched him go by. That evening at supper, he said to the old people:

"What fools you must have been to let them take the Vallins' brat!"

His mother answered sullenly:

"We weren't going to sell our child."

His father said not a word.

The son continued:

"I call it hard luck to be sacrificed like that."

Old Tuvache growled angrily:

"Do you mean to blame us for having kept you?"

"Yes, I do blame you for having been such fools. It's parents like you who ruin their children's chances. It would serve you right if I left you."

His mother wept into her plate. As she gulped down her soup, spilling half of it, she sobbed:

"That's all one gets for working oneself to death for one's children."

"I would sooner not have been born," answered the young man roughly, "than be as I am. When I saw that other fellow just now, my blood boiled, and I said to myself, 'If I'd had my rights, I should have been in his place.'"

He rose from his chair.

"Look here, I see I had better get out of this. I should be casting it up to you from morning till night. I should make your life a burden. There it is. It's a thing I'll never forgive you, never."

The old people sat and whimpered, speechless, and overwhelmed.

He went on:

"The thought of it would be more than I could stand. I would rather go and earn my living somewhere else."

He opened the door. A sound of voices entered. The Vallins, with the son who had come back to them, were holding festival. Charlot stamped his foot, and turning to his parents, shouted:

"You two old stick-in-the-muds," and he disappeared into the night.

# HIS SON

*To Renè Maizeroy*

# HIS SON

In a garden full of flowers, where the spring was burgeoning gaily, two old friends were strolling together. One was a Senator, the other a Member of the Academy. They were both men of standing and repute, of a sober and logical cast of mind. At first they chatted about politics, avoiding abstract ideas, and discussing instead their fellow men, the topic of personalities being more entertaining than that of pure reason. Presently they revived memories of other days, and after a while they walked side by side in silence, relaxed by the warm, enervating air.

A great clump of wallflowers breathed forth a delicate sweet fragrance; a mass of blossoms of all kinds and colours wafted their scents abroad, while a laburnum scattered to the breeze from its racemes of yellow flowers, pollen in a honey-scented cloud of gold dust, fragrant as the clinging powder of perfume shops, diffusing its fertilizing sweetness through space. The Senator paused to inhale the cloud of vitalizing essences and looked at the tree, radiant as the sun, and shedding abroad with amorous lavishness its life-giving particles.

" Only to think," he said, "that these imperceptible atoms, which smell so sweet, will reproduce life hundreds of miles away, and are destined to thrill the fibres and sap of female trees and to create living organisms with

roots of their own, sprung, like us, from a germ; mortal, like us; and, again like us, giving place to other generations of the same species."

Then, standing before the glorious laburnum, whose stimulating odours were wafted on every breath of air, the Senator added:

"Ah, old boy, if you had to count up your progeny, you would have the devil of a job. Here's a fellow who begets his offspring without effort, abandons them without a pang, and thinks no more about them."

The Academician replied:

"We do the same, my friend."

"Yes," replied the Senator, "I don't deny it; we abandon them sometimes, but at least we do so consciously, and therein lies our superiority."

His friend shook his head.

"No, that is not what I meant. What man is there, my dear fellow, who does not own children, of whose existence he is unaware, children, registered with the remark "Father unknown," whom he has begotten almost as unconsciously as this tree begets? If we had to reckon up the women we have possessed, should we not be as much at a loss as this tree here, if it attempted to count its progeny? Between the ages of eighteen and forty, taking into account casual encounters, the transitory passions of an hour, one would have to confess to intimate relations with some two or three hundred women.

"Well, my friend, out of all that number, can you be sure that at least one of these liaisons has not born fruit, and that you do not possess, in the streets or in prison, some rascal of a son, who robs and murders respectable people like us; or a daughter, either in some

house of ill-fame, or if she had the luck to be abandoned by her mother, cook in some family? Remember, too, nearly all public women, so-called, have a child or two whose fathers are unknown to them, the haphazard offspring of promiscuous embraces at ten or twenty francs. Every trade has its profits and losses. These off-shoots are the losses of the profession. Who begot them? You and I and all of us, who call ourselves respectable. They are the outcome of festive dinners with our friends, of merry evenings, of hours when the body, in its exuberance, impels us to snatch a casual gratification. Thieves and vagabonds, all the scum of humanity, are our children. And yet we are better off than if the relationship were reversed; for they, too, these scoundrels, go on propagating.

" My own conscience is burdened with a very sordid story, which I will tell you. It tortures me with incessant remorse, and worse still, with constant doubt, an uncertainty that can never be resolved.

" At the age of twenty-five I went with one of my friends, now a State Counsel, on a walking tour in Brittany.

" After a fortnight or three weeks of vigorous tramping through the Côte du Nord and part of Finisterre, we came to Douarnenez; thence, in one march, we reached the wild headland of the Raz, on the Bay des Trépassés, and slept in a village with a name ending in *of*. Next morning my friend was seized with a curious lassitude, and felt unable to leave his bed. I use the word ' bed ' from force of habit; in reality, our couch consisted of a couple bundles of straw. It was out of the question to be laid up in a place like that. So I urged him to

rise, and about four or five in the afternoon we arrived at Audierne. The following morning he was slightly better, and we set off again; but on the way he felt violently unwell and with great difficulty we made Pont-Labbé.

" There we were lucky enough to find an inn. My friend went to bed and a doctor was summoned from Quimper. He diagnosed a high fever, but could not make out its nature.

" Do you know Pont-Labbé? No? Well, it is the most typically Breton town in all that intensely Breton part of Brittany, which extends from Cape du Raz to Morbihan; that district which preserves the very essence of Breton manners, customs and legends. Even to this day, that little corner of the earth remains almost unchanged.

" I say *even to this day*, because, for my sins, I return there every year.

" There is an old castle, the base of whose towers is washed by a large lake of indescribable dreariness, frequented by wild fowl. A river flows out of the lake, and coasting vessels sail up this river as far as the town. In the narrow streets with their mediæval houses the men still wear the enormous hat, the embroidered waistcoat, the four jackets, one on top of the other, the inside one a mere handsbreadth, hardly reaching below the shoulder blades, the top one stopping just short of the knees of the breeches. The girls are robust, pretty and fresh-coloured. Their busts are squeezed into a cloth waistcoat like a cuirass, which compresses the figure so rigidly that even the contours of their swelling bosoms cannot be divined. They wear a curious head-dress.

The face is framed by two brightly embroidered strips of cloth covering the temples; the hair is dragged back off the forehead, falls to the nape of the neck, and is then piled up on the crown of the head under a quaint bonnet which is often woven of gold or silver.

" The maid at the inn was not more than eighteen. She had eyes of pure blue, a light blue, in which the pupils showed like small black dots. Her small, even teeth, which she showed constantly as she laughed, looked strong enough to bite through granite. She did not know a word of French and spoke nothing but Breton, like most of her countrymen.

" My friend did not get much better, though no specific disease declared itself. The doctor refused to let him travel and prescribed complete rest. So I spent my days by his bedside and the little maid kept coming in, now with dinner for me, now with a cooling drink for the patient.

" I teased her a little and she seemed amused, but naturally we did not converse as we did not know each other's language. Well, one night, as I went to my room after sitting up late with my sick friend, I met the maid going into hers. It was just opposite my open door. Abruptly, without thinking what I was doing, more for fun than anything else, I seized her round the waist, and before she recovered from her surprise, I pushed her into my room and locked the door. Startled, bewildered and frightened, she stared at me, not daring to cry out for fear of a scandal and of being turned out of doors, certainly by her master and probably by her father into the bargain.

" I had begun in play, but as soon as she was in my

room, passion overcame me. For a long time we struggled in silence, matched like wrestlers, twisting, straining, grappling each other, both of us breathless and wet with perspiration. O, she put up a good fight. Sometimes we collided with a table or chair or the wall, and at this, still gripping each other, we remained motionless for a few seconds, in dread lest the noise should have awakened someone in the house. Then we would continue our desperate struggle, in which I attacked while she defended herself. At length she was worn out and collapsed on the floor. She resisted no longer.

" As soon as she was free, she rushed to the door, drew the bolts and fled.

" During the next few days I scarcely saw her. She would not let me come near her. But when my friend had recovered and we had decided to continue our journey next day, she followed me to my room at midnight, with bare feet and in her nightgown. She flung herself into my arms, strained me passionately to her heart and till daybreak lay caressing me, sobbing and weeping, and giving me every proof of love and despair, possible to a woman who did not know a word of my own language.

" In a week's time I had forgotten this adventure, a common enough incident on a journey, the maidservants at an inn being generally expected to entertain travellers in that particular way.

" For thirty years I did not give the matter a thought and I went no more to Pont-Labbé. Then, in 1876, I happened to come there again in the course of a tour in Brittany, which I had undertaken for the purpose of

steeping myself in local colour for a book I was writing. Nothing seemed changed. At the entrance of the town stood the same old castle, its grey walls washed by the lake, and the inn was just the same, though it had been done up and repainted and modernised. On entering I was met by two pleasant, fresh-faced Breton girls of eighteen, wearing the usual tight cloth waistcoats and silver head-dresses and the long strips of embroidery over their ears. It was about six in the evening. I sat down to dinner and as the host made a point of waiting on me in person, some fatality prompted me to ask:

"'Did you know the former proprietors of this inn? I spent ten days here some thirty years back. I am speaking of long ago.'

"'They were my parents, sir,' he replied.

"I then told him the circumstances of my stay, how I had been kept there by a friend's illness. He broke in:

"'O I remember perfectly. I was then fifteen or sixteen. You slept in the room at the end and your friend in the room looking over the street, which is now mine.'

"'Not till that moment did the vivid memory of the little maid flash upon me. I asked:

"'Do you remember a nice little maid your father had, with, if I remember rightly, pretty eyes and fine teeth?'

"'Yes, sir,' he replied, 'she died in child-bed some time after.'

"And, pointing to the courtyard where a lean, lame man was forking manure, he added:

"'There is her son.'

"I burst out laughing.

" ' He is not as handsome as his mother. I dare say he takes after his father.'

" ' That may be,' replied the innkeeper, ' but no one ever knew who he was. She died without revealing his name, and no one was aware that she had a lover. Everybody was much surprised when her condition was known. No one would believe it.'

"I felt a shudder of dismay, one of those transitory but uncomfortable sensations that depress one like a premonition of grave trouble. I looked at the man in the courtyard. He had been drawing water for the horses and was limping along with his two buckets, painfully dragging his shorter leg. He was in rags and horribly dirty; his long, yellow hair was so matted that it hung like ends of string down his cheeks. The innkeeper added:

" ' He is not worth much; he has been kept in the house from charity. Perhaps he would have turned out better if he had been brought up like other people. But what would you have, sir? No father, no mother; no money. My parents took pity on the child, but after all he was not their own.'

" I made no reply. But when I went to bed in my old room, all night long I thought with horror of that stable boy and kept saying to myself:

" ' Suppose he is my son. Am I that creature's father? Am I the murderer of his mother? ' After all, it was quite possible.

" I resolved to speak to the man and to find out the exact date of his birth. A difference of a couple of months would settle my doubts. Next day I sent for him. But, like his mother, he could not speak French.

And indeed he seemed incapable of understanding anything. He had no idea of his age when one of the maids questioned him on my behalf. He stood before me like an idiot, twisting his hat round and round in his knotted, repulsive hands, giggling inanely, though with a hint of his mother's smile in his eyes and the corners of his lips.

" The innkeeper, coming to the rescue, went to find the wretched creature's birth registration. He had come into the world eight months and twenty-six days after my stay at Pont-Labbé, for I remembered perfectly that I had arrived at Lorient on the 15th of August. The entry recorded ' Father unknown ' and the name of the mother, Jeanne Kerradec.

" At this my heart began to beat violently. I choked when I tried to speak, and I stared at this brute, whose long yellow hair looked fouler than the straw of a dung-heap, till the poor beggar grew uneasy under my gaze. He left off smiling, turned his head away and tried to escape.

" I spent the day wandering along the banks of the little river, plunged in painful thoughts. But what was the use of reflection? I could reach no definite conclusion. For hours and hours I weighed every reason, good or bad, for and against, the probability that I was the father, tormenting myself with suppositions hopelessly involved, only to return continually to the same horrible uncertainty, and finally to the still more frightful conviction that this man was indeed my son.

" I could eat no dinner, and I retired to my room. It was long before I could get to sleep. When slumber came it was haunted by appalling nightmares. I saw

that low brute laughing in my face and calling me 'Papa.' Then he turned into a dog and bit my calves. Run as I might he followed me, but, instead of barking, he spoke and abused me. Then he appeared before a meeting of my colleagues of the Academy, who had been convened to decide whether I was really his father. One of them exclaimed:

"'There is no doubt about it. Look at the likeness.'

"And I actually realised that the monster was like me. I woke with this idea fixed in my head, and with an insane desire to see the man again and determine whether we had features in common.

"It was Sunday, and I came upon him as he was going to church. I gave him five francs, while I scrutinized him anxiously. He began to laugh in his imbecile way and took the money; then growing restive again under my gaze, he ran off, stammering some half-articulate word, doubtless intended for thanks.

"I spent the day in the same agony as before. In the evening I sent for the innkeeper and with infinite precaution and skilful diplomacy, I told him that I was interested in this unfortunate creature, so friendless and destitute, and that I wished to do something for him.

"The host replied:

"'Don't worry about him, sir; he's not worth it. You will only be making trouble for yourself. I keep him to clean out the stables; that is all he is fit for. In return I give him his food and he sleeps with the horses. That's all he requires. You might give him an old pair of trousers, if you have one, though it will be in rags in a week.'

"I did not press the matter, but promised myself to

think it over. In the evening the poor beggar came home horribly drunk, nearly set fire to the house, laid out a horse with a pick-axe and finally went to sleep in the mud with the rain beating down on him, and all this thanks to my bounty.

" Next day the innkeeper begged me not to give him money again. Brandy sent him raving mad and if he had a couple of sous in his pocket he spent it on drink. The innkeeper added :

" ' If you want to kill him, give him money.'

" The fellow had never had any money in his life, except a few centimes tossed to him by travellers, and he knew no other destination for these coins but the public-house.

" I spent hours in my room with an open book in front of me which I pretended to read, doing nothing but stare at this brute, who was my son, my own son, trying to discover if he bore any resemblance to me. In the end I thought I recognised similar lines on the forehead and at the base of the nose, and soon convinced myself of a likeness which was obscured by difference of dress and by his hideous shock of hair.

" I could not prolong my stay without arousing suspicion and I left with a heavy heart, after depositing with the innkeeper a sum of money for the benefit of his stable boy. For the last six years I have been obsessed by this idea, this horrible uncertainty, this appalling problem. Every year an irresistible impulse drives me back to Pont-Labbé. Every year I subject myself to the penance of seeing that brute floundering about on his dunghill, of imagining that he is like me, of trying, but always in vain, to be of some use to him. And every

year I return home more undecided, more anguished, more harassed.

" I have tried to have him taught. But he is a hopeless idiot. I have tried to make his life less rigorous. But he is an irreclaimable drunkard and spends on drink whatever money is given him, and he has discovered how to sell his new clothes to buy brandy with the proceeds. I have tried to soften his master towards him and bribed him to treat him kindly. The innkeeper at last came to regard my efforts with surprise. He observed sensibly enough :

" ' Anything you do for him, sir, will only help to ruin him. He must be kept as a prisoner. If he has nothing to do, or is in good spirits, he becomes mischievous. If you want to do some good, it's easy enough. There are plenty of other children who have been abandoned, but choose one who will reward your trouble.'

" What answer could I make? If I allowed a suspicion of the doubts which torture me to penetrate to him, the idiot would have sufficient cunning to blackmail me, compromise and ruin me. He would shout ' Papa ' after me, just as he did in my dream. And I keep telling myself that I killed the mother and was the ruin of this stunted creature, this grub, hatched and reared on a dungheap, who, if he had been bred like other people, would have grown up like them.

" You cannot imagine the strange, complex, intolerable sensation that comes over me when I look at him and think that he owes his being to me, that he is linked to me by the close tie which binds father and son, that, by the dreadful laws of heredity, he is myself in a

thousand ways, in flesh and blood, even with the seeds of my own diseases in him and the gusts of my own passions.

" I am obsessed by an insatiable and morbid craving to look upon him; yet the sight of him causes me horrible pain. Out of my window at Pont-Labbé I watch him for hours, forking and carting manure, and I say to myself:

" ' There goes my son.'

" Sometimes I feel an almost irresistible yearning to embrace him. But I have never even touched his filthy hand."

The Academician ceased. His friend, the statesman, murmured:

" Yes, certainly we ought to do more for fatherless children."

A breath of wind shook the yellow racemes of blossom on the tall laburnum and enveloped the two old men in a fragrant cloud of pollen, which they inhaled in deep breaths. And the Senator added:

" All the same, it is good to be five and twenty and to beget children like that."

# A DEAL

# A DEAL

THE accused, Cæsar Isidor Brument and Prosper Napoleon Cornu, came up for trial before the Court of Assize in the department of Seine-Inférieure, on a charge of attempted murder, by immersion, of Madame Brument, lawful wife of the accused Brument.

The two prisoners were seated side by side on the customary bench. They were both peasants. Brument was small and fat, with short arms and legs and a red, pimply face. His round head was set right down on his short, round body, without any sign of a neck. He lived at Cacheville-la-Goupil in the canton of Criquetot, and was a breeder of pigs. Cornu was lean, of middle height, with abnormally long arms. His face was distorted, his jaw crooked, and he had a squint. He wore a blue smock, as long as a shirt, which came down to his knees. His scanty, yellow hair was plastered close to his skull and gave his face a worn, grimy, broken-down appearance, which was perfectly repulsive. He was nicknamed "The Parson," because he could imitate not only the singing in church but even the sound of the serpent. This accomplishment of his attracted to the public-house he kept at Criquetot many customers, who preferred Cornu's Mass to God's. The witnesses' bench was occupied by Madame Brument, a skinny peasant woman, who seemed to be always asleep. She sat motionless, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes

staring blankly, and a vacant expression on her face. The judge proceeded with his examination.

" I understand, my good woman, that they entered your house and threw you into a barrel of water. Let us hear the facts in detail. Stand up, please."

She rose to her feet, looking as tall as a maypole in her close-fitting white cap.

In a drawling voice she began her story.

" I was shelling haricot beans. They came in together. ' They don't look natural,' I said to myself. ' They're up to some mischief, I'll be bound.' They kept squinting at me sideways, especially Cornu, who squints anyhow. I never feel happy when I see them together, because neither of them is anything to boast of. I said to them, ' What are you up to now? ' But they didn't answer. I had a sort of suspicion . . ."

The accused, Brument, broke in abruptly:

" I was screwed."

At this Cornu turned to his accomplice and remarked in a deep voice like an organ:

" If you say that we were both screwed, you won't be telling any lies."

*The Judge* (severely): " You mean to say that you were intoxicated? "

*Brument*: " There's nothing in that."

*Cornu*: " It might happen to anybody."

*The Judge* (to the witness): " Pray continue your statement, my good woman."

" Then Brument said to me, ' Do you want to earn five francs? ' I said yes, because you don't find five francs under every bush. Then he said to me, ' Wake up, then, and I'll show you what to do.' Then he went

and fetched the big barrel with one end knocked out, which stands and catches the rain water. And he upset it and brought it and stood it up in the middle of my kitchen, and then he said, ' Go and fetch water and fill it up to the top.' So I spent a whole hour going backwards and forwards to the pond with two buckets, bringing more and more water, for the barrel was as big as a vat, if you'll excuse me, sir. And all the time Brument and Cornu kept on having one glass after another with each other, and filling themselves up, till I said to them, ' You're full, you two, fuller than that barrel.' And then Brument said, ' Don't you worry. You mind your own business. Your turn is coming, so look out.' I took no notice, because I knew he was tipsy. When the barrel was brim full I said: ' There you are. I've finished.'

" Then Cornu gave me five francs; Cornu, not Brument, mind you; it was Cornu who gave them to me. Brument said: ' Do you want to earn another five francs? ' I said yes, because I don't often have windfalls like that. So he said to me, ' Undress yourself.' ' Undress myself? ' ' Yes,' he said. ' How far do you want me to undress? ' ' If that's troubling you, you can keep your chemise on. We won't quarrel about that.'

" Well, five francs are five francs. So I undressed, though I didn't like it with those two good-for-nothings looking on. I took off my cap and then my jacket, and then my skirt, and then my sabots. Brument said, ' You can keep on your stockings. We're decent chaps ' and Cornu said, ' Yes, we're decent chaps.' So there I was, almost like mother Eve. And

then they got up, though they were so drunk they could hardly stand, saving your presence, your worship."

" ' What next? ' I said.

" Brument said, ' Are you ready? '

" ' Ready,' said Cornu.

" And then Brument took me by the head and Cornu by the feet like a sheet that has been washed. And didn't I scream! Brument said, ' Hold your tongue, you hussy.' And then they lifted me right up in the air and stuck me into the barrel and it gave me such a shock that all the blood in my body went the wrong way, and I was frozen to my vitals.

" And Brument said:

" ' Is that all? ' And Cornu said, ' That's all.' Brument said, ' Her head isn't in, that ought to count.' ' Put her head in, then,' said Cornu. So then he pushed my head down into the water, as if he meant to drown me, and the water went up my nose, and I thought I was going straight to heaven. And he kept on pushing till I went right under. Then he got a fright and pulled me out and said:

" ' Hurry up and dry yourself, you old bag of bones.'

" I took to my heels and ran to the parson, who lent me one of his maid's skirts, as I was in a state of nature. And he went and fetched Maître Chicot, the keeper, and he went off to Criquetot and fetched the police, who came home with me. And there I found Brument and Cornu fighting like two rams. Brument roared:

" ' It's a lie. I tell you there was a least a cubic metre. The method was all wrong.'

" ' Four buckets-full,' roared Cornu, ' That's not

even half a cubic metre. It's a fact and you can't deny it.'

"The police sergeant stopped them fighting. I couldn't do anything."

She sat down.

There was an outburst of laughter in court, and the jury looked at one another in amazement. The judge addressed the accused, Cornu.

"You appear to have been the instigator of this disgraceful plot. Have you any explanation to offer?"

Cornu rose to his feet.

"Your worship, we were screwed."

"I am aware of that," replied the judge gravely. "Proceed."

"I am coming to it. Well, Brument came to my place about nine o'clock and called for a couple of brandies and said, 'Have one, Cornu.' I sat down opposite him and drank it and then stood him another out of politeness. Then he stood me one, in return, and I stood him another, and so on, glass after glass, until by twelve o'clock we were pretty well screwed.

"So then Brument began to cry, and I felt sorry for him, and asked him what was the matter. He said: 'I must get a thousand francs by Thursday.' I drew in my horns at that, of course. Then he said to me, as cool as you please, 'I'll sell you my wife.'

"Well, I was drunk, and, as I have lost my wife, it rather got me. I didn't know his wife, but a wife is always a wife. I said to him, 'What will you sell her for?' He thought it over, or pretended to be thinking. When one's drunk, one's not very clear-headed. And he said, 'I'll sell her by the cubic metre.'

" I wasn't surprised at this, because I was as drunk as he was, and I'm used to cubic metres in my trade. A cubic metre is a thousand litres. I agreed. The only thing to settle was the price, and that depends on quality.

" ' What do you want for a cubic metre? '

" ' Two thousand francs,' he said.

" I jumped like a rabbit, and then I thought to myself that a woman could not measure more than three hundred litres. All the same I said, ' It's too dear.' He replied, ' I can't take less; I should lose by it.'

" You see he wasn't a pig-dealer for nothing; he knew his trade. But though this bacon-seller is up to all the dodges, I have a spirit of my own, too, seeing as I sell spirits. Ha, ha, ha!

" I said to him, ' If she were new, I wouldn't mind, but you have had her some time, so she's only second-hand. I'll give you fifteen hundred francs a cubic metre, and not a sou more. Will that suit you? '

" He said ' Done. Shake hands on it.'

" I shook hands and we went off arm in arm. One must help one another in life.

" Then something struck me. ' How are you going to measure her by liquid measure, if she is not a liquid? '

" So then he explained his idea, which wasn't an easy matter, considering how drunk he was. ' I shall take a barrel,' he said, ' and fill it brim full with water and put her in. We'll measure all the water she upsets and reckon by that.'

" ' That's a good idea,' I said. ' But the water that she upsets will run away. How will you catch it? "

" Then he called me a fathead and explained that all we had to do was to fill up the barrel again after his wife

got out. We would reckon the amount cf water that was put back.

" I said that ten buckets went to a cubic metre. But he's no fool even when he is drunk, the scoundrel.

" To cut it short, we went home and I had a look at the woman in question. Not what you would call a beauty. She's there, so you can all see for yourselves. I said to myself, ' You've been had. But what does it matter? Pretty or plain, they all serve the same purpose.' Don't they, your worship? And besides, I saw that she was as lean as a rake. I said to myself, ' She doesn't amount to four hundred litres.' I understand these things, being in the liquor trade.

" She has told you what happened, and after all we had let her keep on her chemise and stockings, though that was a loss to me. When it was over, she took to her heels. I said: ' Look out, Brument, she is running away.'

" ' Don't worry,' he replied, ' We can easily catch her again. She'll come home to roost. Let's measure the deficit.' So we measured it, and it wasn't even four buckets-full. Ha, ha, ha! "

The prisoner burst into such uncontrollable laughter that a policeman had to pat him on the back.

When he had regained his composure, he resumed:

" To cut it short, Brument said, ' Nothing doing. It isn't enough.' Then I shouted and he shouted, and I shouted him down. I hit him; he thumped me back. It would have gone on till doomsday, as we were both drunk. Then along came the police. They cursed and swore and got hold of the wrong end of the stick and hauled us off to prison. I claim damages."

He resumed his seat. Brument confirmed on all points the statement made by his accomplice. The bewildered jury withdrew to deliberate. In an hour's time they returned and acquitted both prisoners, but added a solemn rider concerning the sanctity of the marriage bond, and defining the limits within which commercial transactions should be restricted.

Brument set out for the conjugal roof, accompanied by his wife. Cornu returned to his tavern.

# AN EVENING PARTY

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THERE lived at Vernon a notary called Maître Saval, who was passionately fond of music. Though still young, he was already bald, and not disagreeably plump. He was always carefully shaven, and instead of the old-fashioned spectacles, he wore gold-rimmed pince-nez. Active, courtly and gay, he was looked upon as an artist at Vernon. He played both piano and violin, and gave musical evenings at which the newest operas were rendered.

He himself possessed a tiny reed of a voice, which, though of the slenderest quality, he managed with so much taste that there were general exclamations of "Bravo! Exquisite! Astonishing! Delightful!" as soon as his last note died away. He subscribed to a music library in Paris, where he obtained the latest publications. From time to time he issued to the select society of the town, invitation cards which ran as follows:

> "Maître Saval, notary, requests the pleasure of your company on Monday evening, at the first performance of *Saïs* in Vernon."

The chorus consisted of some military officers with good voices, and there were two or three local ladies who sang. The notary himself undertook the part of

conductor and acquitted himself so well, that the band-master of the 190th Regiment of Infantry remarked one day in the Café de l'Europe :

" Maître Saval is a master. What a pity he did not take up music as a profession."

When his name was mentioned in a drawing-room there was always someone to remark :

" He is not an amateur, he is a real artist," and three or four others would exclaim with deep conviction :

" Oh, yes, he is a real artist," with an emphasis on the word " real."

Whenever there was a first night at one of the great theatres in Paris, Maître Saval went up to town for it. A year ago, in accordance with his usual habit, he proposed to be present at a first performance of Henry VIII. He took the express, which arrives in Paris at half-past four in the afternoon, intending to return home by the twelve thirty-five that night, to avoid having to sleep at a hotel. Before starting, he had put on evening dress, concealing his black tail coat and white tie under an overcoat with the collar turned up.

As soon as he set foot in the Rue d'Amsterdam his spirits rose.

" There is something peculiar in the air of Paris,' he reflected, " Something I can't describe, something exhilarating, exciting, intoxicating. It gives one a curious desire to frisk about and do all sorts of things. As soon as I get out of the train, I at once feel as if I had drunk a bottle of champagne. How one could enjoy life in Paris, with artists all round one ! Happy are the elect, the great men, rejoicing in their fame in a city like this. What a life is theirs ! "

His imagination was busy. If only he knew some of those famous men, so that he could talk about them at Vernon and spend an evening with them now and then when he was in Paris! Suddenly an idea entered his head. He had heard of certain small cafés on the outer boulevards, which served as meeting places for painters, who had already made their name, men of letters and even musicians. He began slowly to make his way up towards Montmartre.

He had two hours to spare, and he wanted to see for himself. He wandered past bars full ot seedy Bohemians, and gazed at their faces, trying to discover which of them were artists. At last, attracted by its name, he entered the *Rat Mort*.

Five or six women sat with their elbows on the marble tables, discussing their love affairs, Lucie's quarrels with Hortense, and the scandalous behaviour of Octavius. No longer in their first youth, they were either too fat or too thin, and looked tired and worn. One had a feeling that they had hardly any hair of their own. They tossed off glasses of beer just like men.

Maître Saval seated himself some distance away from them, and waited. It was nearly time for his absinthe. Presently a tall young man came in and took a chair beside him. The landlady addressed him as Monsieur Romantin. Maître Saval gave a jump. Could this be the Romantin, who had been awarded a First in the last Salon?

The new-comer beckoned to the waiter.

"Bring dinner at once, and then take thirty bottles of beer and the ham I ordered this morning round to my

new studio, 15 Boulevard de Clichy. We are going to have a house-warming."

Maître Saval followed his example and ordered dinner; he took off his overcoat, revealing his tail coat and his white tie. His neighbour did not appear to have noticed him, and, taking up a newspaper, began to read. But Maître Saval, who was burning to enter into conversation, cast sidelong glances at him. Two other young men came in, with red velvet jackets and pointed beards in the style of Henri III. They seated themselves opposite Romantin.

" It's this evening, isn't it? " asked one of them.

Romantin shook hands with him.

" Yes, rather. Everyone is coming. Bonnat, Guillemet, Gervex, Béraud, Hébert, Duez, Clairin, Jean-Paul Laurens. It will be a tremendous affair. And the women! Every single actress; that is to say, all of them who are not otherwise engaged."

The landlord came up to them.

" Do you often have a house-warming? "

" I should think so. Every quarter-day, invariably."

Maître Saval could restrain himself no longer.

" Pardon me for intruding, sir," he said hesitatingly, " but I caught your name and I should be much obliged if you would tell me if you are really Monsieur Romantin, whose work I admired so much in the last Salon? "

" The very same, sir," replied the artist.

The notary paid him a well-turned compliment, which made it clear that he was a man of culture. The painter was charmed; he returned a polite reply, and they fell into conversation.

Romantin returned to the subject of his housewarming, describing in detail all the glories of the coming entertainment. Maître Saval questioned him about the guests he was expecting.

"It would be a wonderful thing," he added, "if a stranger had the luck to meet in a single evening such a gathering of celebrities at the house of a distinguished artist like yourself."

Romantin, whose heart was completely won, replied:

"Do come to the party if it would amuse you."

Maître Saval accepted his invitation ecstatically. He reflected that he sould see Henry VIII some other time.

After dinner the notary insisted on paying both bills, in return for his new friend's hospitality. At the same time he paid for the refreshments of the two young men in red velvet. Then he left the café with his painter. They halted in front of a long, low-pitched house. Its first floor had the look of a vast conservatory, being divided into six studios in a row, all facing on to the boulevard.

Romantin led the way; he went up the stairs, threw open a door, struck a match and lighted a candle.

They found themselves in a large room, with no furniture except three chairs, two easels, and some sketches, which stood on the floor, against the walls. Maître Saval remained standing on the threshold, speechless with surprise.

"You see there's plenty of space," observed the painter, "but there's nothing ready yet."

He inspected the bare, lofty room, with its ceiling lost in the gloom.

"This studio has great possibilities," he declared.

And he wandered round it, considering it with the deepest attention.

" It is true that I have a mistress, who could have helped us," he resumed. " Nobody can touch a woman at arranging draperies. But I have sent her into the country for the day, because I wanted her out of the way this evening. It is not that I find her troublesome. But she's a bit too genteel; she would have been a wet blanket."

He considered the matter for a moment. Then he added:

" She's a good girl, but not easy to get on with. If she knew I was giving a party, she would scratch my eyes out."

Maître Saval had not stirred from the spot. The situation was beyond him. The artist went up to him.

" As I have invited you to the party, you must make yourself useful."

" Certainly," replied the notary. " I am entirely at your disposal."

Romantin took off his jacket.

" Well, old boy, let's get to work. We must clean the place."

He darted behind the easel, on which stood a painting of a cat, and produced a worn-out broom.

" Here you are. You sweep, while I consider the question of lighting."

Maître Saval took the broom, looked at it and began awkwardly brushing the floor, raising a storm of dust.

Romantin stopped him impatiently.

" Good Lord, don't you know how to sweep a room? Here, watch me."

And he began to push the heap of grey dust along the floor in front of him, as cleverly as if he had done nothing else all his life. Then he handed the broom back to the notary, who endeavoured to imitate him.

In five minutes he had raised such a cloud of dust in the studio that Romantin called out:

"Where are you? I have lost sight of you."

Maître Saval came up to him, coughing.

"How would you set about improvising a chandelier?" asked the painter.

"A chandelier?" exclaimed the lawyer in consternation.

"Yes, a chandelier for lighting the room, a chandelier with candles."

The notary was puzzled.

"I haven't the least idea."

The painter began to caper about the room, snapping his fingers like castanets.

"Well, your highness, I have had an inspiration. Do you happen to have five francs on you?" he added more soberly.

"Certainly."

"Then run out and buy five francs' worth of candles, while I go to the cooper's."

And he pushed the notary out-of-doors in his evening-dress. Five minutes later they returned to the studio, the lawyer with the candles, the painter with a hoop off a barrel. Romantin dived into a cupboard and brought out about twenty empty bottles, which he fastened all round the hoop. Then he went downstairs to borrow some steps from the hall-porter's wife, after explaining that he had won the old lady's favour by painting her

cat's portrait, over there on the easel. He returned with the steps and turned to Maître Saval:

"Are you limber in the joints?"

"Why, yes," replied the notary innocently.

"Then you can climb up and fasten my chandelier to the ring in the ceiling. When you have done that, put candles in all the bottles; later on you can light them. I tell you I have a genius for illuminations. But for heaven's sake, take off that coat. You look like a flunky."

The door was flung violently open, and on the threshold appeared a woman, her eyes blazing. Romantin gazed at her with a look of horror. She stood there for a moment with folded arms. Then in a shrill voice, quivering with passion:

"Oh, you dirty dog, so that's how you treat me!"

Romantin made no reply.

"You wretch, you, pretending to be so kind and giving me a day in the country. I'll teach you to have a party," she went on, working herself up. "I'll receive your guests for you; I'll fling your candles and your bottles in their faces."

"Matilda, Matilda," pleaded Romantin in a deprecating voice.

But she would not listen to him.

"You just wait, my fine fellow, you just wait."

Romantin went up to her and tried to take her hands.

"Matilda."

But she was fairly launched. She ran on and on, emptying her whole arsenal of abuse; expletives poured from her lips like a torrent of filth, and the words tumbled over one another in their haste to escape. She

stammered and gabbled, now and then recovering herself sufficiently to fling at him an insult or an oath. He had seized her hands, but she was not aware of it. She was so completely absorbed in reciting her grievances, in relieving her feelings, that she seemed scarcely to realise his presence. At last she began to cry, without, however, interrupting her flow of abuse. But her voice grew strained and tearful, and presently it was broken with sobs. She tried once or twice to make a new start, but her emotion strangled her and at last the flood of words gave way to a flood of tears. At this, touched by her distress, he clasped her in his arms and kissed her hair.

"Matilda, my dear little Matilda, listen to me. Be reasonable. Why, I am only giving a little party to thank my friends for my Salon Medal. I cannot possibly invite ladies. You ought to be able to see that yourself. Artists are not like ordinary people."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she sobbed.

"I was afraid of vexing you and hurting your feelings. Now listen to me. I am going to take you home. You will go quietly to bye-bye, like a good girl, and I'll come back to you as soon as the party is over."

"And you'll never do it again?"

"Never, I swear."

He turned to Maître Saval, who had at last succeeded in hanging up the chandelier.

"I'll be back in five minutes, my dear fellow. If anyone comes while I am away, you'll do the honours for me, won't you?"

He carried off Matilda, who kept sniffing and drying her eyes. Maître Saval remained alone and finished

tidying the studio. Then he lighted the candles and waited.

Quarter of an hour, half an hour, an hour elapsed, but Romantin did not return. Suddenly there was an appalling noise on the stairs: a score of voices and the rhythmic tramp of feet like a regiment of Prussians on the march. The whole house rocked with the measured tread. Then the door was flung open and a mob burst in. They filed into the studio, like a snake uncoiling itself. Beating time with their heels they roared out:

"Walk in, walk in, one and all,
Nursemaids smart and soldiers tall."

Maître Saval, in his evening-dress, remained rooted to the spot under the chandelier in utter bewilderment. The invaders caught sight of him and uttered a howl.

"A flunky! A flunky!"

They wound around him, until he found himself the centre of a vociferating circle. Then they took hands and danced madly round and round. He endeavoured to explain:

"Ladies and gentlemen—ladies and gentlemen."

But no one listened to him. They circled round him leaping and shouting.

At last the dance came to and end.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" bleated Maître Saval.

A tall, fair man, bearded up to the eyes, interrupted him.

"What is your name, my man?"

"I am Maître Saval," replied the frightened notary.

"You mean Baptiste," cried one of the party.

"Leave the poor fellow alone," said one of the

women, " or you will get him rattled. He is paid to wait on us, not for us to make fun of him."

Maître Saval saw that each of the guests had brought a contribution; a bottle, a pie, a loaf of bread, or a ham. The tall man thrust an enormous sausage into his hands.

" Arrange the buffet in the corner over there, with the bottles on the left and the food on the right."

At this Saval lost his head.

" But I am a notary, gentlemen."

There was a momentary silence, succeeded by wild peals of laughter. One of the men asked suspiciously:

" How did you get here? "

Saval explained his intention of going to the Opera, described his departure from Vernon, his arrival in Paris, and all the incidents of the evening.

The guests sat round him listening to his story; they poked fun at him and called him Scheherazade.

Romantin did not return. More guests arrived. Maître Saval was presented to them and requested to repeat his story. When he refused, they insisted. They tied him to one of the three chairs in the room, with a woman on either side, who kept on filling his glass. He drank, laughed, talked, and even tried to burst into song. He tried to dance with his chair and fell down.

From that moment everything was a blank, but he had an idea that he was being undressed and put to bed, and that he was not feeling at all well.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. He was lying in a strange bed at the back of a closet.

An old woman with a broom in her hand was glaring at him with an air of fury.

" What a beast! Fancy getting drunk like that."

Utterly abashed, he sat up in bed.

" Where am I? "

" Where are you, you dirty beast? You're drunk. Clear out of this, and hurry up about it."

He attempted to get up, but he was naked and there was no sign of his clothes.

" Madam . . . " he began.

Then he remembered. What was to be done?

" Has Monsieur Romantin not come back yet? "

" Will you get out of this? " scolded the porter's wife. " Don't let him find you here."

" But I haven't any clothes," exclaimed Maître Saval in consternation. " They have been taken away."

He had to possess his soul in patience, to explain matters, communicate with his friends, and borrow money to buy clothes. He did not make his escape till evening.

And now in his handsome drawing-room at Vernon, when the conversation turns on music, he declares emphatically that painting is a vastly inferior art.

# HIS CONFESSION

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WHEN Captain Hector Marie de Fontenne married Mademoiselle Laurine d'Estelle, their friends and relations shook their heads over the prospects of the match. Laurine was a pretty girl, slender, fragile, fair-haired, dashing, who at the age of twelve had possessed all the assurance of a woman of thirty. She was one of those precocious products of Parisian society, who are born with a complete endowment of worldly wisdom, feminine guile and audacity of thought. Her mind had those deep-seated qualities of cunning and subtlety, which condemn persons of this type to be continually tricking and deceiving, whether they will or no. Their actions always appear to be premeditated, their behaviour calculated, and their words carefully weighed. Their whole existence is merely a part in a comedy, with their fellowmen as onlookers. She was attractive, too, and possessed such a keen sense of humour that she could not restrain or control herself when anything struck her as odd or amusing. She would burst out laughing in people's faces in the most impudent manner, but she did it so charmingly that no one was ever angry with her. And she was rich, very rich indeed.

Her marriage to Captain de Fontenne was negotiated by a priest. Educated with extreme austerity in a religious seminary, the young man entered upon regi-

mental life with the morals of the cloister, the most rigid principles and the most Puritanical intolerance. One of those men of whom saints or Nihilists are made, his principles ruled him absolutely; in his beliefs he was inflexible and in his resolutions unshakeable. He was tall and dark. In character he was grave, austere, ingenuous, simple, reticent and self-willed, the type of man who goes through life without ever penetrating beneath the surface or perceiving its shades and subtleties, who, wholly devoid of imagination or finesse, can make no allowance for anyone whose thoughts, ideas and beliefs differ from his own.

Laurine took his measure as soon as she saw him. She accepted him and the marriage was a complete success. She was adaptable, adroit, discreet, and successfully pretended to be everything that she ought to have been. Assiduous alike at church and theatre, at once worldly and devout, she showed an equal zeal for good works and social functions. With a faintly ironical expression on her face and a twinkle in her eyes she would converse solemnly with her solemn husband. She told him about her charitable enterprises, which brought her into touch with all the clerics of the parish and the surrounding districts, and under cover of these pious pursuits she absented herself from her home from morning till evening. But now and then, in the middle of an account of some virtuous act, she would be seized by a sudden burst of hysterical and uncontrollable laughter. On these occasions her husband would remain surprised and uneasy and even a little shocked. When she composed herself he asked,

"What is it, Laurine?"

"O, nothing," she replied, "only something funny that came into my head." And she would put him off with some story or other.

In the summer of 1883, Captain de Fontenne was away on manœuvres with the 32nd Army Corps. One evening camp was pitched on the outskirts of a town. After ten days of tents and open country, of fatigue and privations, his brother officers welcomed the opportunity for a festive dinner. At first Captain de Fontenne declined to be of the party, but eventually, seeing that his refusal was greeted with surprise, he consented to join them. His neighbour at table, Major de Favré, while engaging him in conversation on military operations, the only subject in which Captain de Fontenne took a passionate interest, kept filling up his glass for him. It had been a day of oppressive heat, which parched the throat and created a mighty thirst. Absent-mindedly, Captain de Fontenne went on drinking, unconscious of an unaccustomed gaiety which was gradually stealing over him, a curious sensation of lively and glowing happiness and well-being, with which were minged dawning desires, unknown yearnings and vague expectations.

By dessert he was drunk, and talking and laughing excitedly. His intoxication took that noisy and silly form usual with men who are naturally quiet and sedate. A proposal was made to finish the evening at the theatre, and he went on with the rest of the party. A brother officer recognised in one of the actresses an old flame of his, and a supper party was arranged which was graced by some of the ladies of the cast.

The next morning the Captain awoke to find himself

in a strange room, in the arms of a little, fair-haired woman, who said as soon as he opened his eyes:

"Good morning, my pet."

At first he was utterly bewildered, but gradually a hazy recollection of what had happened began to dawn upon him. He rose without a word, dressed, and emptied the contents of his purse on the mantelpiece. He was overcome with shame when he found himself standing in full uniform, his sword at his side, in this furnished apartment with its shabby curtains and its forbidding, much-spotted sofa. He could not pluck up courage to go away for fear of meeting people on the stairs, confronting the house porter, and, worst of all, having to emerge from the house into the street in full view of the neighbours and the passers-by.

The woman kept girding at him: "What's the matter with you? Have you lost your tongue? It was wagging fast enough last night. What a duffer you are."

He made her a ceremonious bow, and at last, having nerved himself sufficiently to make his escape, he hastened back to his quarters, feeling that everything about him, his manner, his bearing, his face, would proclaim to the world where he had been.

He was tortured with remorse, the agonising remorse of an austere and ascetic nature. Even after he had been to Confession and Communion, he remained ill at ease, haunted by the memory of his lapse and by a feeling that he had failed in a sacred duty, his loyalty towards his wife. He did not see her till the end of the month, as she was away on a visit to her parents, while he was on manœuvres.

## *HIS CONFESSION*

She welcomed him with smiling face and open arms. But he met her with a constrained air of conscious guilt, and hardly said a word to her all day. As soon as they were alone she asked,

"What is the matter with you, my love? You seem to me quite changed."

He answered in confusion:

"It's nothing, my dear, nothing at all."

"O, but I know you well enough to be sure that there is something on your mind, some trouble or grief, or worry."

"Very well, you are right; there is something on my mind."

"Well, what is it?"

"I cannot possibly tell you."

"Not tell me? Why? You alarm me."

"I am unable to give you reasons, but I cannot possibly tell you."

She had thrown herself on a settee, but he continued to walk up and down, with his hands behind his back, avoiding his wife's eyes.

"Come, I see it is my duty to hear your confession and I have a right to know the truth. You must not have secrets from me, any more than I have from you."

He stood in the embrasure of the lofty window, with his back to her.

"My dear, there are things which it is better not to mention. And this trouble of mine is one of them."

She rose from her seat, crossed the room, seized his arms, and made him turn round. Then she put both her hands on his shoulders, and, looking into his eyes, smiled at him coaxingly.

" Why, Marie " (she called him Marie in moments of affection), " You cannot hide things from me. I shall begin to think that you have done something wrong."

" So I have. Something very wrong indeed," he muttered.

" As bad as all that? " she replied lightly. " I can't believe it of you."

" I am not going to tell you anything about it," he returned sharply. " It is no use your insisting."

At this she drew him towards an armchair, made him sit down, and perched herself on his right knee. Then she printed a light, swift, fugitive kiss on the curled end of his moustache.

" If you don't tell me, I'll never be friends with you again."

In an agony of remorse he exclaimed:

" If I tell you what I have done, you will never forgive me."

" On the contrary, my love, I shall forgive you on the spot."

" Impossible."

" I promise."

" I tell you it's impossible."

" I swear to forgive you."

" No, dear Laurine, you never could."

" How simple you are, my love; I might almost say how silly! If you refuse to tell me what you have done, you leave me to imagine all sorts of horrible things. I should resent your silence quite as much as your mysterious crime. But if you own up frankly, I shall have forgotten all about it by to-morrow."

" The fact is . . . "

" Well? "

He blushed up to the ears and said in solemn tones:

" I will confess myself to you, Laurine, as I would to a priest."

Across her lips flitted the sudden smile which sometimes hovered there when she was listening to his conversation.

" I am all ears," she said, with a hint of raillery in her voice.

" You are aware, my dear," he resumed, " how temperate I am in my habits. As you know, I drink nothing but weak wine and water and never touch liqueurs."

" Yes, I know."

" Well, you will hardly believe it. One evening, towards the end of the manœuvres, I was very tired and thirsty and worn out, and I indulged in more wine than . . ."

" You got drunk? How horrid of you! "

" Yes, I got drunk."

She had assumed an air of severity.

" Dead drunk? So drunk that you couldn't walk? Confess."

" Oh no, not as drunk as that. I lost my head, but I kept control of my limbs. I merely talked and laughed and didn't know what I was doing."

He was silent.

" Was that all? " she pressed him.

" No."

" Ah! And afterwards? "

" Afterwards a disgraceful thing happened."

She looked at him uneasily, a little alarmed, a little distressed.

"What did you do, my dear?"

"We invited some actresses to supper . . . and I don't know how it happened, but I was unfaithful to you, Laurine."

He made this confession in grave and solemn tones. She gave a little start, and her eyes began to twinkle with sudden, deep-seated, irrepressible amusement.

"You . . . you . . . unfaithful . . ."

Three times her words were interrupted by short spasms of nervous laughter. She endeavoured to compose herself, but whenever she attempted to utter a word, laughter quivered in her throat, and, strive as she might, kept bubbling up and brimming over, as irrepressible as froth from a newly opened bottle of champagne. She put her hand over her mouth, vainly attempting to control herself and to stem this unhappy outburst of hilarity. But in spite of herself her bosom heaved with laughter which trickled through her fingers and burst out.

"You . . . you . . ." she gasped. "You! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

And she could not help throwing at him such a curious, mocking glance that he was utterly dumbfoundered. And suddenly she came to the end of her tether and let herself go, bursting out into peal after peal of hysterical laughter and short, shrill shrieks of mirth that seemed to rise from the depths of her bosom. Holding her sides, she was seized by paroxysms that almost choked her, like the paroxysms in whooping cough. Every effort she made to control herself brought

on a new attack; every attempt to speak resulted in fresh convulsions of merriment.

"My poor dear, my poor dear, ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

He rose from the armchair, leaving her in sole occupation. He had turned very pale.

"Laurine," he exclaimed, "your behaviour is more than unseemly."

"What can you expect?" she gasped, utterly beside herself with glee. "I . . . I can't help it. How funny you are! How funny you are! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

His face grew livid. In the intent gaze he fixed upon her there was a glimmering of a strange suspicion. Suddenly he opened his mouth as if to speak, but no words came. Turning on his heel, he left the room and closed the door behind him. Doubled up in her chair, weak and exhausted, Laurine still continued to utter ripples of expiring laughter, which spasmodically revived like the last flickering flames of a conflagration.

# MADAME HUSSON'S ROSE-KING

# MADAME HUSSON'S ROSE-KING

We had just passed Gisors, where I had roused myself in order to hear the name of the station. As I was falling asleep again, a violent jolt shot me into the arms of the stout lady in the seat opposite. The engine, with one wheel broken, was lying across the track and beside it were the tender and luggage van, likewise derailed. Groaning, wheezing, gasping, sputtering in its death agony, the engine was like a fallen horse which, snorting, trembling in every limb, its flanks heaving, its chest labouring, seems incapable of making the smallest effort to struggle on to its legs again.

Apart from a few bruises, there were no casualties, for the train had not had time to get up speed. We gazed disconsolately at the huge, maimed iron monster, no longer able to draw us along, and blocking the line indefinitely until the necessary breakdown train could be despatched from Paris.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when this happened and I at once made up my mind to return to Gisors and have luncheon there. As I was walking along the line I kept wondering, "Gisors? Gisors? Surely I know someone there. Who can it be? Gisors? Let me think. I am certain that I have a friend there."

And, suddenly, a name flashed across my mind: "Albert Marambot," an old schoolfellow, whom I had not seen for at least twelve years. He was now a doctor, and in practice at Gisors. He had often invited me to pay him a visit, but hitherto, in spite of frequent promises, I had never done so. I now decided to seize the opportunity.

I asked the first man I met where Dr Marambot lived.

"Rue Dauphine," he replied at once, in the drawling Norman accent.

And to be sure, on the door of the house he had pointed out to me I saw a large brass plate with my old friend's name engraved upon it. I rang the bell, but the maid, a slow-moving girl with yellow hair, stolidly replied:

"He's not in, he's not in."

I heard the rattle of cutlery and glasses.

"Marambot! Marambot!" I called.

A door was thrown open and a stout, whiskered man with a peevish expression came out, holding a table napkin in his hand. I should certainly never have recognised him. He would have been taken for forty-five at least. In a single moment the whole effect of provincial life, with its deadening, coarsening, ageing influences, became plain to me. A flash of insight, swifter even than my proffered handshake, revealed to me his whole existence, his way of life, his type of mind, his theories of the universe. I divined the lengthy meals to which he owed the roundness of his belly; his post-prandial drowsiness; the lethargy induced by a sluggish digestion and nips of brandy; the absent-minded glances he would bestow upon his patients,

while his thoughts were dallying with the roast chicken turning in front of his kitchen fire. The redness and puffiness of his cheeks, the grossness of his lips, the melancholy lustre of his eyes, sufficiently prepared me for his dissertations on cookery, cider, brandy, wine, the preparation of certain dishes, and the thickening appropriate to special sauces.

"You don't recognise me," I said. "I am Raoul Aubertin."

He threw his arms round me and nearly smothered me, and this was his first remark:

"I hope you haven't had luncheon yet?"

"No."

"What luck! I was just going to sit down. I have a splendid trout."

Five minutes later I was seated opposite him at table.

"You are still a bachelor?" I asked him.

"Yes, rather."

"And you enjoy life here?"

"I am never bored. I have plenty to do. I have my patients and I have my friends. I live well, and I have my health. I enjoy a good laugh, and I am fond of shooting. What more could you want?"

"Life is not too dull in a little town like this?"

"No, my dear fellow, not if you know what to do with yourself. Essentially a small town is much the same as a large one. Its incidents and amusements have not the same variety, but one magnifies their importance. Your friends are fewer, but you meet them oftener. If you know all the windows in a street, every one of them has more interest and piquancy than a whole street in Paris. A small town is very entertaining,

very entertaining indeed. You see I have the story of this particular little town, Gisors, at my fingers' ends, from its earliest beginning down to the present day. You have no idea what a quaint history it has."

"Are you a native of Gisors?"

"No. I come from Gournay, its neighbour and rival. Gournay is to Gisors what Lucullus was to Cicero. Here they are all out for glory and people talk about the braggarts of Gisors. At Gournay their God is their belly and they are known as the Gluttons of Gournay. Gisors looks down on Gournay, but Gournay laughs at Gisors. It's a very comical little corner of the world."

I became aware that I was eating something particularly delicious, soft-boiled eggs embedded in a layer of meat jelly, seasoned with herbs, and discreetly iced. To please Marambot I smacked my lips.

"First-rate, this."

He smiled.

"The two essential ingredients are good jelly, which is not easily procured, and good eggs. How rare they are, really good eggs, with reddish yolks, and the proper flavour. I keep two poultry yards, one for eggs and one for fowls for the table. I have a special method of feeding my layers. I have my own ideas on the subject. In an egg, just as in chicken, beef, mutton or milk, you recover, and you should be able to taste, the extract, the quintessence of all the food that the animal has consumed. How much better people would fare if they paid more attention to that point."

"I see you are an epicure," I laughed.

"I should think so. So is everyone who isn't an idiot. Man is an epicure just as he is an artist, a

scholar, a poet. The palate, my dear fellow, is as delicate and susceptible of training as the eye or ear, and equally deserving of respect. To be without a sense of taste is to be deficient in an exquisite faculty, that of appreciating the quality of comestibles, just as a person may lack the faculty of appreciating the quality of a book or a work of art. It is to want a vital sense, one of the elements of human superiority. It consigns a man to one of the innumerable categories of cripples, degenerates and fools, of which our race is composed. In a word, it implies an alimentary stupidity, precisely on a footing with mental deficiency. A man who cannot tell a crayfish from a lobster, or a herring, that admirable fish which comprises all the different flavours and essences of the sea, from a mackerel or a whiting, or a William pear from a Duchess, may be compared to a man who cannot distinguish Balzac from Eugène Sue, a Beethoven symphony from a military march by a regimental bandmaster, the Apollo Belvedere from the statue of General de Blanmont."

"Who on earth is General de Blanmont?"

"Why, of course, you don't know. It is obvious that you are not a native of Gisors. As I remarked just now, my dear fellow, the inhabitants of this town bear the name of braggarts of Gisors, and never was an epithet better deserved. However, let us finish our luncheon first, and afterwards, when I show you round, I'll tell you all about the place."

From time to time he ceased talking, in order to sip slowly half a glass of wine, which he eyed affectionately, as he replaced it on the table. With his table napkin round his neck, his flushed cheeks, his eyes

bright with excitement, his whiskers fringing his never-resting jaws, he was a comical spectacle. He forced food upon me to the point of suffocation. Presently, as I was anxious to return to the railway station, he took my arm, and escorted me through the streets.

The town has a provincial prettiness of its own. Dominated by its fortress, the most remarkable specimen of VIIth century military architecture in the whole of France, Gisors itself commands a long green valley in whose pastures the solid Norman cows browse and ruminate.

"Gisors," said the doctor, "is a town with a population of four thousand, and is situated on the borders of Eure. It is mentioned as early as the Commentaries of Cæsar: Cæsaris-ostium, then Cæsartium, Cæsortium, Gisortium, Gisors. I won't insist upon your visiting the Roman encampment, traces of which are still plainly visible."

"My dear fellow," I replied laughingly, "I'm afraid you are suffering from a disease, which you, as a doctor, ought to study, the cult of the parish pump."

He checked himself suddenly.

"The cult of the parish pump, my friend, is nothing but instinctive patriotism. I have for my house an affection which extends to my town and my province, because in these I can still recognise the customs of my village. But if I have a feeling for the frontier, if I am ready to defend it, if I resent my neighbour setting foot there, it is because I feel myself threatened in my house; it is because that unknown frontier is the gateway to my province. Now I am a Norman, a true Norman. Well, in spite of my bitterness towards the

Germans and my longing for revenge, I do not detest them, I do not instinctively hate them, as I hate the English, who are the real, hereditary, natural enemies of the Normans. Over this country, the home of my ancestors, the English have swept a score of times, pillaging and ravaging, and hatred of that perfidious race was transmitted to me by my father with life itself. . . . Look, there's the statue of the General."

" Which General? "

" General de Blanmont. We had to have a statue. It isn't for nothing that we are the braggarts of Gisors. So we discovered General de Blanmont. Now look at the window of that book shop."

He drew me in front of a book shop, where there was an attractive array of some fifteen volumes, in yellow, red, and blue bindings. I was seized with irrepressible laughter as I read the titles: *Gisors, its Origin and its Future,* by Monsieur X, member of several learned societies; *History of Gisors,* by Abbé A; *Gisors, from the time of Cæsar to our own days,* by Monsieur B., landowner; *Gisors, and its surroundings,* by Dr C. D.; *Celebrities of Gisors,* by a Student.

" My dear fellow," Marambot resumed, " Not a year elapses, not a single year, mind you, without the publication of a new history of Gisors; we have twenty-three already."

" And the celebrities of Gisors? " I asked.

" O, I won't cite them all; I will merely mention the most important. First we have General de Blanmont, then Baron Davillier, the well-known ceramist, who explored Spain and the Balearic Islands, and brought to the notice of collectors the wonderful Spanish-

Arabic faiences. In the realm of letters, we have Charles Brainne, a very able journalist, now dead; still living is Charles Lapierre, the distinguished manager of *Le Nouvelliste de Rouen,* and there are many others, many others."

We were strolling up a long street, built on a slight incline, and exposed from end to end to the glare of the June sun, which had driven all the residents within doors. At that moment we caught sight of a drunken man, reeling along at the far end of the street. With head thrust forward, arms dangling, and nerveless legs, he advanced towards us by short rushes of three, six, or ten rapid steps, followed by a pause. After a brief spasm of energy, he found himself in the middle of the street, where he stopped dead, swaying on his feet, hesitating between a fall and a fresh burst of activity. Suddenly he made off in a new direction. He ran up against a house, and clung to the wall as if to force his way through it. Then, with a start, he turned round, and gazed in front of him, open-mouthed, his eyes blinking in the sun. With a movement of the hips, he jerked his back away from the wall and continued on his way. A small yellow dog, a half-starved mongrel, followed him barking, halting when he halted, and moving when he moved.

" Look," said Marambot, " There is one of Madame Husson's Rose-kings."

I was puzzled by this remark. " One of Madame Husson's Rose-kings? What do you mean by that? "

The doctor burst out laughing. " O, it's only a local name for drunkards. It's derived from an old

story which has now become legendary, although every detail of it is true."

"Is it an amusing story?"

"Very amusing indeed."

"Then let me hear it."

"Delighted. Once there lived in this town an old lady called Madame Husson, very virtuous herself, and a patron of virtue in others. I must tell you that I am giving you the real names and not fictitious ones. Madame Husson devoted herself to good works, relieving the poor and encouraging the deserving. She was short, brisk of movement, and adorned with a black silk wig. Her manners were ceremoniously polite, and she was on excellent terms with God, as represented by Abbé Malou. She had a deep instinctive horror of vice and especially of that form of vice to which the church refers as the lusts of the flesh. Irregularities before marriage put her beside herself, and exasperated her almost to fury. Now about this time, it was the custom round about Paris to award a chaplet of roses to girls distinguished for good behaviour, and Madame Husson took it into her head to have a Rose-queen at Gisors.

"So she laid the matter before Abbé Malou, who at once drew up a list of candidates. But Madame Husson had a maid, an old retainer called Françoise, who was as uncompromising as her mistress. As soon as the priest left the house, Madame Husson sent for her maid.

"'Look, Françoise,' she said, 'these are the girls whom the Vicar suggests for the prize of virtue. Try to find out what is said about them in the neighbourhood.'

" Françoise set to work. She collected all the gossip, all the tales, all the tittle-tattle and scandal of the town. Lest the details should escape her memory, she wrote them down among her accounts in her marketing book, which she presented every morning to her mistress. After adjusting her spectacles on her narrow nose, Madame Husson would read as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Bread . . . . | four sous. |
| Milk . . . . | two sous. |
| Butter . . . . | eight sous. |

'Last year Malvina Levesque misconducted herself with Mathurin Poilu.

| | |
|---|---|
| Leg of mutton . . | twenty-five sous. |
| Salt . . . . | one sou. |

'Madame Onésime, the laundress, met Rosalie Vatinel with Cæsar Piénoir in the Riboudet wood at dusk on July 20th.

| | |
|---|---|
| Radishes . . . | one sou. |
| Vinegar . . . | two sous. |
| Salts of sorrel . . | two sous. |

'As far as one knows, Josephine Durdent has never made a slip. At the same time, she corresponds with young Oportun, who is in service at Rouen, and who has sent her a present of a bonnet by diligence.'

" Not one emerged spotless from this rigorous inquisition. Françoise questioned everyone, the neighbours, the tradesmen, the schoolmaster, the school sisters, and accepted even the most insignificant rumours. No girl on earth entirely escapes the tattling tongues of gossips. In the whole neighbourhood not a single young woman

could be found whom the breath of scandal had not touched. But Madame Husson insisted that, like Cæsar's wife, the Rose-queen of Gisors should be above suspicion. Confronted with her maid's marketing book, she was plunged into the depths of dismay, disappointment and despair.

" The adjacent villages were included in the quest, but the result was the same. The mayor was consulted: his candidates failed too. Nor, in spite of the definiteness of his professional guarantees, were those of Dr Barbesol more fortunate.

" At last one morning Françoise came home from some errand and said to her mistress:

" ' To tell the truth, ma'am, if you are determined to crown someone, the only fit person in the district is Isidore.'

" Madame Husson remained deep in thought. She knew all about Isidore. He was the son of Virginia, who kept a greengrocer's shop. His chastity was proverbial, and had been for several years a source of joy to Gisors. It was a topic of hilarious conversation, and afforded endless amusement to the girls, who delighted in teasing him. He was over twenty years of age, tall, ungainly, slow and timid. He helped his mother in her shop, and sat all day long in a chair before the door, sorting out fruit or vegetables. He was possessed by a morbid terror of petticoats, which caused him to lower his eyes as soon as a customer smiled at him, and this notorious bashfulness made him the butt of every giddy girl in the town. He was so quick to blush at loose words, ribald jests, and unseemly allusions, that Dr Barbesol nicknamed him the thermo-

meter of modesty. Was he ignorant, or was he not? some of the neighbours slily wondered. What was the cause of this emotion that so perturbed the son of Virginia, the greengrocer's widow? Was it a mere conjecture concerning mysteries shameful and unknown, or repugnance for the degrading embraces ordained by love? The street boys would run past his shop, shouting frank obscenities at him to make him lower his eyes. The girls would amuse themselves by walking up and down in front of him, indulging in indelicate jokes which drove him indoors. The boldest of them were openly provocative, mockingly offering him assignations, and making the most outrageous suggestions.

"No wonder Madame Husson was pensive. Undoubtedly, Isidore was an instance of exceptional, conspicuous, impregnable virtue. No one, not the most sceptical, the most incredulous of mankind, could venture to suspect Isidore of the smallest infringement of any moral law whatever. He had not so much as been seen in a café, or in the streets of an evening. He always went to bed at eight and rose at four. He was perfection; a pearl of purity.

"And yet Madame Husson still wavered. The idea of substituting a Rose-king for a Rose-queen perplexed and troubled her, and she made up her mind to consult Abbé Malou.

"'What do you wish to reward, Madame Husson? Virtue, I take it, virtue pure and simple. In that case, what does it matter to you whether its exponent be male or female? Virtue is eternal, and knows neither country nor sex. Virtue is simply virtue.'

" Thus encouraged, Madame Husson paid a visit to the mayor, who entirely concurred.

" ' We will have an impressive ceremony,' he said, ' and another year, if we find a woman as deserving as Isidore, we will award the chaplet to a woman. We shall certainly be setting an admirable example to Nanterre. Let us not be exclusive; we will welcome merit wherever we find it.'

" When Isidore received the intimation, he blushed deeply, and seemed pleased.

" The coronation was fixed for August 15th, the fête of the Virgin Mary and of the Emperor Napoleon. The municipality were determined to invest the function with special brilliancy, and a platform had been erected on Les Couronneaux, a delightful extension of the ramparts of the old fortress, where I am just going to take you. As a result of a natural reaction in the popular mind, Isidore's virtue, hitherto held in derision, had suddenly become a respectable and enviable quality, since it was about to secure for him five hundred francs, a savings bank book, oceans of consideration, and glory to burn. The girls began to regret their levity, their laughter, their free behaviour, and Isidore, although he remained modest and timid, wore a little air of complacency, which revealed his secret gratification.

" By the evening of August 14th, the whole of the Rue Dauphine was be-flagged. The route, which the procession was to follow, was strewn with flowers as for Corpus Christi Day, and the National Guard paraded under its commanding officer, Major Desbarres. This officer was an old stalwart of the Grand Army, and, side by side with the case that contained his Croix

d'Honneur, bestowed by the Emperor in person, he was wont proudly to exhibit a Cossack's beard, severed from its owner's chin by one stroke of the Major's sabre, on the retreat from Russia. And, what is more, the corps he commanded was a crack corps, famous throughout the province. His company of Gisors Grenadiers used to be summoned to grace every function of note within a radius of fifteen or twenty miles. The story goes that when Louis-Phillipe was reviewing the Eure militia, he halted in admiration before the Gisors company, and exclaimed:

"'O, who are these fine Grenadiers?'

"'They are from Gisors,' replied the general.

"'I thought as much,' murmured His Majesty.

"So Major Desbarres and his men, with a band at their head, marched to Virginia's shop to fetch Isidore. When a few bars of music had been played under his windows, the Rose-king himself appeared on the threshold. He was dressed from head to foot in white duck, and wore a straw hat, with a little bunch of orange blossom for a rosette. The question of his dress had greatly perplexed Madame Husson, who could not decide between the black coat worn by boys at their first communion and a complete suit of white. Françoise, her counsellor, however, had turned the balance in favour of the white suit, pointing out that the Rose-king would look like a swan. Behind him followed Madame Husson, his proud patroness and sponsor. As they emerged from the house, she took his arm, while the mayor placed himself on the Rose-king's left. The drums beat. Major Desbarres shouted:

" ' Present arms ! '

" The procession set out for the church through vast crowds, gathered together from all the neighbouring townships. After a short service and a touching address from Abbé Malou, the procession made its way to Les Couronneaux, where a banquet was served in a marquee.

" Before the guests seated themselves, the mayor made an oration. I can repeat it to you word for word. It was such a splendid speech that I learned it off by heart.

" ' Young man, Madame Husson, a woman of substance, beloved by the poor, respected by the rich, to whom, on behalf of the whole neighbourhood, I tender thanks, has had the happy and beneficent thought of instituting in this town a prize for virtue, which will be of priceless encouragement to the population of this beautiful district. You, young man, are the first to wear the crown of this dynasty of virtue and chastity. Your name will head the list of those found worthy. I would impress upon you that all the rest of your life to your dying day must be in accordance with the promise of this auspicious beginning. To-day, in the presence of this noble woman, who rewards your conduct, in the presence of these soldier citizens who have taken up their arms in your honour, in the presence of this deeply moved throng, gathered here to acclaim you, or rather, in your person to acclaim virtue, you enter into a solemn engagement with your town, with all of us, to maintain until the end of your days the admirable example of your youthful purity. Never forget, young man, that you are the first seed sown upon this field

of our hopes. Bring forth the fruits we have a right to expect of you.'

" The mayor took three steps forward and clasped the sobbing Isidore to his bosom. The Rose-king wept, he hardly knew why. He was surging with confused emotions, in which joy and pride were mingled.

" Then the mayor placed in one of Isidore's hands a silken purse. There was gold in it, clinking gold, five hundred francs in gold. In his other hand he placed a savings bank book. And in a solemn voice he exclaimed:

" ' All homage, glory and wealth to virtue! '

" Major Desbarres roared, ' Bravo! '

" The Grenadiers shouted, the crowd clapped their hands. It was Madame Husson's turn to dry her eyes.

" After this, the guests seated themselves at the banqueting table.

" It was a magnificent affair of interminable length. Dish followed dish. Glasses of yellow cider and red wine stood fraternally side by side, to be presently mingled in the systems of the revellers. The clatter of plates, the sound of voices, the discreet music of the band, were all merged in a deep unceasing clamour, which lost itself in the blue sky where the swallows were circling. Now and then, as she chatted to Abbé Malou, Madame Husson would readjust her black silk wig, which kept slipping over one ear. The mayor was excitedly talking politics to Major Desbarres. As for Isidore, he was eating and he was drinking as he had never eaten and drunk in his life before. He had two helpings of everything. He was experiencing for the first time the delight of filling himself with good things,

which were alike pleasant to the taste and comforting to the inner man. He had dexterously loosened his waistband, which was becoming too tight under the increasing expansion beneath it. He only stopped eating in order to raise his glass to his lips, and he kept it there as long as possible, enjoying the flavour at his leisure. He sat in silence, feeling a little guilty because of a drop of wine that had fallen on his white coat.

"Later on, many toasts were proposed, and were enthusiastically honoured. Evening approached. The banquet had lasted ever since noon. Above the valley floated delicate wisps of milk-white mist, the filmy vesture in which night swathes brooks and meadows. The sun touched the horizon. From the misty pastures came the distant lowing of cows. It was all over. The party made their way back to Gisors. The procession, now disbanded, walked at its ease. Madame Husson with her arm in Isidore's, was bestowing on her protégé much excellent and earnest advice. They halted at the greengrocer's door, leaving the Rose-king in his mother's house.

"But his mother was still away. Her family had invited her to another function in honour of her son, and after following the procession to the marquee where the banquet was held she had gone to lunch with her sister. Isidore remained alone in the shop in the deepening dusk. His head was whirling with his triumph and with the wine he had drunk. He took a chair and looked about him. The close air of the room was heavy with the strong vegetable odours of carrots, cabbages and onions, mingled with the sweet pene-

trating smell of strawberries, and the delicate, elusive fragrance of a basket of peaches. The Rose-king seized a peach, and took a large bite out of it, although his skin was as tight as a drum. Then, utterly beside himself with joy, he suddenly broke into a dance. Something jingled inside his coat.

" In surprise he plunged his hands into his pockets, and drew out the five hundred francs, which, in his intoxication, he had forgotten. Five hundred francs! Why, it was a fortune! He poured the louis out on the counter, then, with a slow, caressing gesture of his big, flat palm, he spread them out so that he could see them all simultaneously. There were twenty-five of them, twenty-five round gold coins, every one of them gold! They shone out on the wooden counter through the deep gloom, and he counted them over and over again, touching each coin with his finger and muttering,

" ' One, two three, four, five . . . a hundred; six, seven, eight, nine, ten . . . two hundred.' Then he returned them to the purse, which he stowed away again in his pocket.

" Who knows, who can tell, what grim struggle raged in the Rose-king's soul between the powers of good and evil; with what headlong attacks, stratagems, and temptations Satan beset that timid and virgin heart; what suggestions, images and desires the Evil One conjured up, to compass the ruin of that elect soul? Madame Husson's paragon seized his hat, the very hat that still bore the little sprig of orange blossom. Escaping from the house by the little lane at the back, he disappeared into the night.

" When Virginia heard that her son had returned, she

went home without delay, only to find the house empty. At first she waited without anxiety. But when a quarter of an hour had elapsed she began to make enquiries.

"The neighbours in the Rue Dauphine had seen Isidore enter the house, but had not seen him emerge. A search was made for him; he was, however, nowhere to be found. In her distress, Virginia hurried to the Town Hall. The Mayor could give her no information, except that he had himself accompanied the Rose-king to his door. When the news of her protégé's disappearance reached Madame Husson she was already in bed. Immediately she rose and resumed her wig, and went to see Virginia. Virginia, with the rapid emotion of an uncultured mind, was sitting among her cabbages, carrots, and onions, dissolved in tears.

"Some accident must have happened to him. But what could it be? Major Desbarres ordered the constabulary to patrol the town. On the road to Pontoise, the little bunch of orange blossom was picked up. It was placed upon the table around which the authorities were deliberating. The Rose-king must have fallen a victim to some plot, some jealous machinations. But how, by what means, and with what motives, had this innocent been spirited away?

"Weary with their search, the authorities went to bed. Virginia alone spent the night watching and weeping.

"The next morning, however, on the return of the stage coach from Paris, Gisors learnt to its amazement that its Rose-king had stopped the coach some two hundred yards from the town, had taken a seat, paid

for it with a louis, for which he had received change, and eventually had calmly alighted in the heart of the great city.

"The consternation was general. Letters were exchanged between the mayor of Gisors and the head of the Paris police, but led to no discovery.

"Day followed day, until a whole week had elapsed. At last, Dr Barbesol, out early one morning, saw a man in a suit of grey material, sitting in a doorway, fast asleep, with his head against the wall. He went up to him, and recognised Isidore. His attempts to wake him were without success. The ex-Rose-king was plunged in a deep, impenetrable, disquieting slumber. The doctor, in alarm, went for help to carry the young man to Boncheval's dispensary. When he was lifted from the ground, an empty bottle was found concealed beneath him, and after he had sniffed it, the doctor announced that it had contained brandy. It was a useful indication of the remedies to be employed. They were successful. Isidore was drunk, dead drunk, and utterly degraded by a whole week of debauchery. He was not fit to be touched by a rag-picker. Nothing was left of his immaculate suit of white duck but a mass of rags, stained grey and yellow, greasy, muddy, tattered and vile. He stank of the gutter and of every form of degradation.

"He was washed and lectured and locked up, and for four days he did not stir from the house. He seemed to be penitent and ashamed. There was no trace of the purse with the five hundred francs, nor of his savings bank book, nor of his silver watch, a sacred legacy from his father the greengrocer.

" On the fifth day he ventured into the Rue Dauphine. Pursued by inquisitive glances, he slunk along close to the houses, with hanging head and furtive eyes. He vanished on the outskirts of the town in the direction of the valley. Two hours later he reappeared, chuckling to himself, and reeling against the walls. He was drunk, hopelessly drunk.

" He was incorrigible. His mother turned him out of the house, and he became a carter and carted for the firm of Pougrisel, which is still in existence.

" He gained such a reputation for drunkenness that even at Evreux people talked of Madame Husson's Rose-king, and all the drunkards of this neighbourhood have that nickname given to them. A good deed is never wasted."

. . . . . .

Dr Marambot rubbed his hands together as he ended his story.

" Did you personally know the Rose-king? " I asked.

" Yes, I had the honour of closing his eyes."

" What did he die of? "

" Why, a fit of delirium tremens, to be sure."

We were close to the old fortress, a heap of ruined walls, still dominated by the massive tower of St Thomas of Canterbury and by the so-called Prisoner's Keep.

Marambot told the story of the prisoner who, with the help of a nail, covered the walls of his cell with sculpture, following the course of the sun, as it filtered through the narrow slit of a loophole.

Next I learned that Clothaire II had bestowed the patrimony of Gisors upon his cousin, St Romain, Bishop of Rouen; that after the Treaty of St Claire-

sur-Epte, Gisors had ceased to be the capital of the whole of the Vexin; that the town, being the strategical key to the whole of this region of France, had in consequence of this distinction, been captured and recaptured times without number. By order of William the Red, the celebrated engineer, Robert de Bellesme, constructed a powerful fortress, which was attacked later by Louis the Fat, then by the Norman Barons; defended by Robert de Candos, surrendered by Geoffrey Plantagenet to Louis the Fat, recaptured by the English through the treachery of the Knights Templars; its possession contested by Philippe-Auguste and Richard Cœur de Lion; burnt by Edward III of England, who failed to take the castle; seized anew by the English in 1419, surrendered later to Charles VII by Richard of Marbury, taken by the Duke of Calabre, held by the League, inhabited by Henry IV, and so forth and so forth.

Marambot had become almost elegant. He remarked again with conviction:

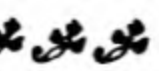
"What scoundrels the English are! And what drunkards, my dear fellow, Rose-kings every one of them, the hypocrites!"

After a pause he pointed to the slender stream, gleaming among the meadows.

"Did you know that Henry Monnier was one of the most ardent fishermen on the banks of the Epte?"

"No, I didn't know."

"And, Bouffé, my dear fellow, Bouffé made stained glass here."

"You don't say so!"

"Why, to be sure! Your ignorance is simply incredible."